

The *Intellectuals*

MARY DIXON THAYER

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The
INTELLECTUALS



"Now where do you live?" asked Mrs. Rushabout.
"Does Mother take in washing?"

page 183

The *INTELLECTUALS*

A Friendly Satire

BY MARY DIXON THAYER

Author of

Treasures

Advice to Will-Be Débutantes, etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STUART HAY



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Dedicated

TO

MY MOTHER AND MY FATHER

WHO HAVE LONG ENDURED THE WILD

INCOHERENT INCANTATIONS OF AN *INTELLECTUAL* CHILD

SOLILOQUY

I ENTIRELY realize that in writing a treatise upon such serious-minded persons as *Intellectuals* I am wilfully laying myself open to censure. However, come what may, I cannot resist the temptation — and perhaps my impertinences may be somewhat pardoned if my readers remember that I have been for some time affiliated with the Organization and that, therefore, I am laughing no more at others than at myself when I uphold for merriment our peculiar characteristics.

It must be distinctly understood that *Intellectuals* as referred to in this volume are of a unique class — that is to say, of the self-nominated, self-seconded, and self-elected class, and that they are there-

SOLILOQUY

fore in no way associated with those pitiable, real Intellectualists who, conscious of the fact of actual intellectualism, eke out a dreadful existence, alone, unknown, unapplauded and uninitiated into the strange and poignant joys of those who are fatuously convinced of their own genius.

It is not of the impotent Intellectualist, then, of that obscured, impossible individual who invariably dies before he is discovered that I treat; rather of the legions of gratingly self-asserting, self-appraising, self-successful *Intellectuals* who tread during life the heady trail of Fame and Plenty and sink, at death, into a pit of suitable oblivion . . . of *these* is our tale.

PROLOGUE

*Sages warn us there must be
Intellectuals bold and free,
Wild and weird through all time
Found in every age and clime.*

*We have but to look about —
Intellectuals rave and shout,
Prance and mimic and create,
Quote and argue and abate*

*Not their frenzy for a day.
(Oh, how do they get that way?)
Then what use, you ask, to dwell
On the Intellectual?*

*Those who know them, who have met
The poor creatures, would forget
(If they could) that tragic jest —
Intellectuals at their best.*

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*But you cannot thus ignore
Those who stand at every door
Of Art and Knowledge, peering in,
Piping forth in accents thin*

*All they do not know, and who
Set their wily traps for you,
Dull your reason, sift your brain,
And despatch you off again!*

*So the purpose of this book
Is to make you pause, and look,
Watch their antics — if you smile
Then my writing is worth while.*

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I

The *Intellectuals*

ADOPT A NEW MEMBER

The *Intellectuals*

I

The *Intellectuals*

ADOPT A NEW MEMBER

I HAD always longed to be an *Intellectual*. Even as a child I frequently woke suddenly from a sound sleep, leaped from my bed, turned on the electric light, and strode to the mirror — where I remained gazing fascinated upon myself. My wonderful dark eyes held unplumbed depths of power. I knew myself a genius. Yet I worried; I worried unceasingly. Would other people know it? Ah, even in youth I realized the

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futility of possessing talent did the world not perceive it also! Often, when creating, I would pause, trembling with ecstasy, and reread the lines that I had penned. I knew them to be immortal.

Yet no one else did. Oh, the agony of those moments! The torture I suffered! To possess the divine spark unacknowledged by the world — this — this is horrible in excess! (Many cannot understand.)

As I grew up the consciousness of my superhuman genius increased — became astoundingly, hauntingly vivid. My mind was a ferment of visions which I caught with the point of my pen and translated profusely upon paper. But no one realized their beauty. Editors refused to read, openly scoffed. *Never for an instant*, however, did I doubt myself. I pitied their blindness. I remembered that true genius was seldom appreciated, and that

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mine, being true, was infinitely elevated. I waited. I knew they would find me out. They did.

It was my *Sonnet to the Moon* that first attracted attention. This work as you know is indeed supremely beautiful, but it does not compare with many of my other poems. If I may go further I would even hint that this sonnet, being not quite as sublime as my other creations, was more intelligible to the multitude and to the cramped, if necessary, minds of the publishers.

Yet I do not believe that even now, with its beauty admitted, any of my readers have perceived, in it, its intrinsic meaning. I have been accused of vagueness. Such accusation would proceed only from the uneducated since genius, in its very essence, is necessarily vague; its possessor is obliged to clothe the spiritual brilliancy of his images with, as it were, a veil of

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flesh, lest his readers' eyes be wholly dazzled. Petrarch, Dante, Milton, Browning and I have been blamed for erring in this particular. Will critics never admit that the fault, if fault there is, rests within the narrow confines of their own perceptions and not, as they stupidly maintain, in the mentality of the writer?

I met Mrs. Rushabout at the Club the day after my sonnet had appeared in one of the leading magazines. She made a bee-line for me. "My dear, *dear* Miss Would-be, . . . I had no idea that you *wrote* — why, the whole city is discussing your poem! It is lovely! simply lovely! and so — so —"

"Intellectual?" I ventured hopefully.

"Exactly — intellectual — that's it; full of the most sublime appreciation of beauty! Shelley and Keats, Miss Would-be, Shelley and Keats, exactly. You are the reincarnation of both! Keep it up!"

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And she dashed for the dining room (having perceived out of the corner of her eye that there was chicken salad for luncheon).

I wondered what, precisely, I was to "keep up." Probably sonnets to the Moon. I felt perfectly capable of keeping up sonnets to the Moon indefinitely, but it might be more amusing, I had thought, to try the Sun next time, or perhaps even a star. If they *would* have the Moon, however, then Moon it would be.

I was accosted at the door by Miss Snobber, Intellectualissimo Altissimûs, President of the Drowning Society for the Muscular Development of Poetry, Chairman of the Committee for the Investigation of the Religious Conflicts of William Shakespeare, authority on Plato, Cup-o, and American Blue Laws. She bumped into me as I was about to emerge into the street. She had never conde-

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scended to bump into me before. I was stunned with the bump and with the realization that it had been a bump from Miss Snobber.

“My *dear* child,” said Miss Snobber, “I was so pleased with your poem — so *very* pleased! May I ask if you are of the artistic temperament?”

“Oh, very,” I agreed. “In fact it might almost be said, Miss Snobber, that the artistic temperament is of me.”

Miss Snobber pondered this remark, obstructing the hallway quite unconsciously meanwhile as she stood lost in meditation. Then she shrieked suddenly with merriment and tapped me coquettishly on the shoulder with a long, aristocratic finger.

“Quite so — quite so — oh, very witty, really extremely witty! Now what” — she added, bending toward me in an attitude copied from a masterpiece of Sir Joshua Reynolds — “what, exactly, was your

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inner, mystic, subconscious, reflex inhibition in this poem?"

I was terrified — but I said, "The Moon." Miss Snobber understood. She gazed out of the door dreamily and nodded.

"The Moon — of course — those waves of diaphanous radiance, proceeding upon the ether, entered the precincts of your soul and unloosed the meshes of genius. You must join our Club," she ended abruptly.

"And you can't say no. I realize you are dreadfully busy, but really you *cannot* afford to refuse this invitation. It is not given to *everyone*, you understand."

I had no idea of refusing, although I accepted with a show of reluctance.

"What kind of club is it?" I asked when everything had been arranged.

"It is a Club formed for the discussion of the New Art," said Miss Snobber flatly,

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and eyed me warily. "We study the Russians in literature, the Vers Librests in poetry, the Futurists in painting, the Modernists in religion. We are children," she added modestly, "of the New Error."*

"Ah yes," I said, and smiled knowingly. But I felt suddenly faint. I knew that I did not know any more about the New Error than I knew about the old, and I knew that I knew nothing whatever about the old. I dreaded my utter humiliation before these enlightened children of the Dawn.

"We meet," said Miss Snobber, "every Friday afternoon in my apartments. You must realize, Miss Wouldbe, that it is a purely mental — a purely intellectual association. Birth counts for nothing. Birth, after all, is but the sordid arrangement of matter. And matter is nothing. Soul is all. Now tell me confidentially —

* Sometimes spelt "Era."

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do you personally believe that souls are in reality one and that the individual soul is but a disunited fragment of the entire mental energy of the world?"

"I do indeed, Miss Snobber," I said, "and what is more I believe that Missing-link, in his *Life of the Bat*, has given a very marked impulse to the Irish Question!"

Miss Snobber gazed at me admiringly. "*Really?* You must explain this theory at the meeting. The name of our Club, by the way, is the 'Debate and Inquiry.' We inquire into everything, Miss Wouldbe. We do not believe in false shame. In fact we believe that shame is false. We begin by inquiring into the workings of human nature and proceed into inquiry of the workings of the human soul. A flower is as beautiful to us, Miss Wouldbe, as the Grand Canyon of the Colorado or the Falls of Niagara. We pierce the out-

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ward appearances of things and plumb the depths of being in search of the First Cause of the Ultimate End. Now a flower, as you will readily agree, possesses a first cause and an ultimate end no less interesting than the Grand Canyon or the Falls of Niagara. This, however, is only evident to the *intellectual* mind. Who was it, Miss Wouldbe, who said "To me the smallest flower that blows — grows — brings thoughts too deep for tears?" Well, no matter. That is the idea at any rate."

"Was it Wordsworth?" I ventured.

"I think not," said Miss Snobber. "I think it was Robert Fulton or Patrick Henry — but it does not matter. The idea alone matters. It is ideas, Miss Wouldbe, is it not, which raise us from round to round of the ladder leading up to Heaven?"

"Ah, but Miss Snobber!" I exclaimed,

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“You do not — you *cannot* believe — in Heaven?”

Miss Snobber looked pained and confused.

“Certainly not, Miss Wouldbe — a mere figure of speech — a metaphor — but I believe in the Destiny of the Human Race — if you know what I mean.”

I didn't.

“At the gatherings of the Inquiry Club,” continued Miss Snobber, “you will meet only interesting people — people who are alive — people who *think*, whose minds are open to every impression. You will be tremendously stimulated. After all, Miss Wouldbe, I am not sure but that that is not what constitutes happiness — stimulation — mental stimulation. Whatever startles us with clearer vision, whatever stirs the dormant fibres of our being — is not this, and this alone, what we seek in pursuing happiness?”

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"I have not quite made up my mind on the subject," I said. "But I am at present preparing a treatise for the *Pacific Monthly* in which I discuss the 'Elements of Happiness Considered From the Viewpoint of a Tree Toad and an Aboriginal Man.' The very question that you have raised, Miss Snobber, I am about to analyze in this comprehensive study."

"Ah, Miss Wouldbe, how delightful — how clever! A tree toad and an aboriginal man! Fascinating! Entrancing! You must let me know when it comes out."

I supposed then that she meant the article, but on later consideration was haunted by a terrible thought. *Could* she have meant the tree toad? I do not know when tree toads come out — I must look this up in the *Encyclopedia*.

Miss Snobber had remained talking with me so long that Mrs. Rushabout ate up all the chicken salad before she, Miss

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Snobber, could get any, and appeared contentedly in the hall just as Miss Snobber was bidding me farewell.

“Friday afternoon,” said Miss Snobber, “don’t forget — three o’clock — and remember you are to speak upon the ‘Life of the Bat and the Irish Question.’ ”

She disappeared.

Mrs. Rushabout approached, stiffly.

“I presume,” she remarked, “that you have been invited to join the Debate and Inquiry Club.”

“I have, Mrs. Rushabout,” I admitted.

“Stuff and nonsense!” said Mrs. Rushabout forcefully. “It is stuff and nonsense! I have never been invited to join.”

“A pity,” I murmured, “a great pity that such an intellect as yours —”

“Exactly, Miss Wouldbe. But these foolish women do not perceive my great qualities. I am a born leader, Miss Wouldbe, a born organizer, a born de-

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bater, a born social service worker, but because my abilities do not tend toward sentimental tommyrot poetry, or meaningless dabbling in paint, I am ignored — utterly ignored — yet I am a born . . .”

I saw perfectly that Mrs. Rushabout had been born, and also I saw that I had borne a good deal from Mrs. Rushabout.

I drew myself up. “I trust that you do not mean to imply that my *Sonnet to the Moon* is sentimental tommyrot poetry — or that —”

“Oh, certainly not — Miss Wouldbe — how *could* you suspect me of such ignorance? Your *Sonnet* is divine — simply divine. An idiot could see that!”

An idiot had, I mused.

“Divine —” repeated Mrs. Rushabout, softly, and began to quote:

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*“See! Yonder slides the Moon
From the black arms of night —
Eternal youth — and radiant,
Clothéd in purest white,
Her face averted that the world
May never — can never —”*

“Dear me! I have forgotten, and I spent an hour memorizing it this morning! How unfortunate!”

The dear woman seemed dreadfully upset. But suddenly her face brightened.

“You must come and hear me speak before the Committee for the Prevention of Cruelty to Bugs!” she exclaimed.

“When will you speak?”

“This afternoon — at four. Really, you must promise you’ll come. It will be most interesting — most intellectual.”

I could not afford to miss anything intellectual.

“And perhaps,” whispered Mrs. Rush-

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about, "perhaps — when you've heard me speak — you'll propose me as a Member of the Debate and Inquiry Club. Of course it is stuff and nonsense, that Club — purely stuff and nonsense — but they are making a mistake not to have me." And she hustled away.

Thus it was that I became an *Intellectual* and an *Intellectual* once "became" can never be anything else. Though in future I should speak with the tongues of parrots and of asses, though I should utter the most absurd and inconsequent nonsense, nevertheless I shall be heeded, I know, with awe and reverence, shall be pursued by Publishers and Editors, and my slightest actions will assume, in the vulgar eye, an importance out of proportion with their character.

My hopes are realized. "*Intellectual* I am, *Intellectual* I remain." *Cogito, ergo sum!*

II

The *Intellectuals*

START A "BIG MOVEMENT"

II

The Intellectuals

START A "BIG MOVEMENT"

WHEN I arrived at the Meeting of the "Committee for the Prevention of Cruelty to Bugs," Mrs. Rushabout had just taken her place upon the elevated speakers' platform at one end of the room.

The large hall was crowded. I noticed Miss Snobber on the front row seated beside Mr. Tearitdown and Mr. Patchitup. These two gentlemen, well known in political circles, were intimate friends although their efforts toward political reform were exerted in opposite directions.

Mr. Tearitdown was a most pessimistic optimist. Everything was wrong, he de-

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clared, but everything could be made right. Eliminate everything! he shouted continually in letters to the Evening Papers; raze the old, inadequate, incompetent institutions to the ground! build up new ones! The Constitution of the Government should be wholly altered. Life was change. The Constitution was static. Therefore the Constitution was not life; therefore it could not adapt itself to life; therefore it should be torn up, rewritten. With the Constitution, also, should be discarded all static laws, ideas and prejudices, such as Marriage, Religion, and a hundred others. When this conscientious housecleaning was once accomplished then he, Mr. Tearitdown, might consent to formulate new, vital and progressive theories from the energizing essence of which would spring, in no time, a magnificent and unadulterated civilization.

But first, maintained Mr. Tearitdown,

START A "BIG MOVEMENT"

everything must be abolished; until that coveted day of Iconoclasm rampant, however, Mr. Tearitdown perforce occupied himself with criticising, ridiculing and disagreeing. He criticised and ridiculed everything from Santa Claus' beard to Mr. Patchitup's necktie. And he disagreed with every human being upon every known subject, and was never *once* heard to agree that he disagreed.

Mr. Patchitup, on the other hand, was an optimistic pessimist. The world could never be made perfect, he declared. He was forever reminding his associates that human nature was essentially corrupt and a prey to grievous and unconquerable passions. War, he repeated, had always existed. It would, therefore, continue to exist until the end of time. Nothing could prevent war. War was bound to occur just as surely as the evil in man was bound never to be eliminated. The best that

could be done, he thought, was to prevent men from endeavoring to prevent war.

“Let us,” said Mr. Patchitup, “look upon war as an unfortunate but necessary disease, a disease that can only be counteracted temporarily, and by forceful surgery. By all means let us have a Large Standing Army.”

Also, thought Mr. Patchitup, the Constitution of the United States, Religion, and the most general idea of Matrimony were well enough. Too strenuous alteration, he declared, would lead only to unrest and revolution. But some alterations there should be — and these alterations, according to Mr. Patchitup’s opinion, should be accomplished tactfully, unobtrusively, slowly. Thus, if the Constitution of the States proved, in part, disconcerting, why by all means change that part — but do not make a brawl about it. If Religion prove, to the individual, a de-

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terrent to particular ambitions, why by all means disregard Religion, but do not openly contradict it. If the Christian law of Marriage prove disagreeably irksome, well — do not fling the whole conception into the dust heap — get a divorce!

Luckily Miss Snobber sat between Mr. Tearitdown and Mr. Patchitup; they waited, with the rest of the audience, for Mrs. Rushabout to speak.

Mrs. Rushabout, when she stood up, was for a moment a trifle embarrassed. The sudden silence seemed to deprive her of speech. Then, overcoming her emotion, she began:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we are assembled here for an extraordinary, an unprecedented purpose — the formation of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Bugs. It seems to me that this purpose, which draws us with one accord together, is one typifying more than anything else

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the idealism and charity with which we have emerged from the terrible conflict of brute force known as War. . . .”

Here she paused and the audience applauded.

“There have been Societies,” went on Mrs. Rushabout, “for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but never, to my knowledge, has there been a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Bugs. (Applause)

“Have the sensibilities of man been utterly dulled until this moment? Has the gigantic intellect of man not grasped, until now, the fact that suffering is not dependent upon size — that a flea can suffer as poignantly as a cow? that a mosquito’s nervous system responds as quickly and unerringly to pain as the nervous system of a zebra or a bull pup? Ah, dear people, I fear that this is so. I fear that, incon-

START A "BIG MOVEMENT"

ceivable as it is, we have not, until this moment, realized the acute, the horrible, the unnecessary agony that is inflicted daily upon *bugs*! (Sobs and gasps from the audience)

"Bugs!" exclaimed Mrs. Rushabout tragically. "*Bugs*! Is there any word in our beautiful English language that has been as misrepresented, scorned, and ridiculed? The word 'bug' has come to mean, for many, the very essence of discomfort. It has even been applied, I believe, to men and women deprived of the use of reason! And yet this word 'bug,' if rightly understood, is supremely beautiful. All things, dear people, are beautiful, if rightly understood."

Mrs. Rushabout here paused for the second time and I saw that her eyes were shining with tears. Perhaps she was thinking of the *Ephydra*.

"Picture to yourself!" she cried feel-

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ingly, "the utter cruelty with which thousands of these tiny creatures, known as bugs, are daily exterminated! No one protects them. No one sympathizes with them. No one even troubles to ascertain the correct name of the particular species he is about, very probably, to destroy for all eternity! The simple, the sweet, the gentle epithet of 'bug' is enough to incense these human fiends to kill — and they kill ruthlessly, senselessly, furiously. Were it not for the efforts of this Society in future I might almost dare to predict that soon there would be no bugs at all!

"No more bugs! Imagine, dear people, if you can, a world without bugs! What a dull, what a dreary, what a deplorable spectacle! And yet the government sanctions the use and concoction of innumerable insect powders, pastes, and liquids designed with the deliberate intention of

annihilating the universe of bugs! Action must be taken immediately to prevent the impending catastrophe. We must struggle valiantly, my dear people, to make the world safe for bugs! (Renewed applause, stamping, and shouts of "Yes! Yes!")

"This morning," went on Mrs. Rushabout, "I had occasion to observe a fly in my coffee. The fly in my coffee, dear people, was an old fly of the species, I judged, *Musca domestica*. It was struggling frantically but weakly against the thick and oily substance in my cup. I lifted it tenderly onto the tablecloth and covered it with salt — a remedy which, as you doubtless know, has seldom been found to fail when applied to drowned flies of the species *Musca domestica*, *Eproboscidea*, *Proboscidea* or *Coleoptera*.

"To my unbounded joy the fly recovered and crept at last from his seeming tomb into the light. I could scarcely

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restrain my happiness. I feel that my life today has not been quite in vain since I restored to health this helpless, this pitiful, this dying bug! (Enthusiastic applause)

“With this little practical lesson,” continued Mrs. Rushabout, “I will close, and give place to more eminent speakers. I am, after all, but a lover of bugs and make no claim to scientific knowledge on the subject.

“But, dear listeners, I must say one word more. I feel that we, who are gathered here, are indeed ushering in a new error of Sympathy and Understanding. I feel that we are standing upon the very brink of Man’s Higher Altruistic Development, I feel that in no way is this development more clearly manifest than in the formation of this unique Society in the Annals of History — this Society which is destined, I believe, to encompass

START A "BIG MOVEMENT"

the earth and to preserve, for future generations, the bugs of today — this necessary, this unprecedented, this glorious Society — this Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Bugs!" (Deafening applause and shrieks of "Huzzah! Huzzah! Mrs. Rushabout! Mrs. Rushabout!")

Mrs. Rushabout sat down, smiling contentedly, and beamed upon the audience.

Mr. Patchitup, who was the next speaker, stepped upon the platform and bowed to left and right, not forgetting the center.

"You have just heard," said Mr. Patchitup, "a great-hearted, noble-souled woman. She has spoken upon this problem of bugs generously and with intelligence, but it seems to me —" and here Mr. Patchitup glared directly at Mr. Tearitdown, "it seems to me that, in this preservation of bugs, some exception should be made in the case of Mosquitoes, Cock-

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roaches and Bedbugs. I beg you to believe that I speak from experience when I state that Mosquitoes, Cockroaches and Bedbugs are not necessary for the welfare of posterity and might, therefore, be exterminated. (Cries of 'No! No! all bugs are good!')

"Mosquitoes," went on Mr. Patchitup, "indulge habits which are particularly irritating to the uneducated masses and it would be extremely difficult to prevent Force being exerted upon them. I myself," confessed Mr. Patchitup, "have once killed a mosquito." In the horror-struck silence which followed this admission of guilt and weakness unbecoming a Man of Intellectual Propensities, Mr. Tearitdown being unable, apparently, to control himself longer, leapt upon the platform.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he cried, "Hear me! Mark well my words! I am

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indeed a lover of bugs! I love bugs as no other man or woman in this great assembly could possibly love them — but, ladies and gentlemen, I love bugs so much, I respect bugs so deeply, that I cannot stand by and see bugs suffer at the hands of ignorant mortals! I cannot bear to watch bugs trampled under foot, poisoned, and slapped! I realize that, in spite of all that this Society can do, these atrocities will continue. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I hold, I maintain, I declare that it is to the interest of bugs that they be utterly and wholly *exterminated!*"

Instantly the Lecture Hall was in pandemonium. Umbrellas, books, and eyeglasses hurtled through the air. People shouted unintelligibly at one another and many couples began to fist-fight — Mr. Patchitup and Mr. Tearitdown being among the most ferocious of those engaged.

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In the general turmoil I managed to gain the door and found Mrs. Rushabout beside me.

"Well," said she, "and what did you think of my speech?"

"Admirable! Mrs. Rushabout!" I cried, "admirable! So concise and so appealing!"

"I have always been interested," she murmured, "in the future of bugs. I believe I am the real instigator of the 'Bug Movement.' "

I turned to look at the Lecture Hall where now a seething, disorganized, howling battle was in progress.

"It is a Big Movement," I said.

III

The *Intellectuals*

OCCASIONALLY AGREE

III

The Intellectuals

OCCASIONALLY AGREE

OF course I attended the Friday afternoon gatherings at the Salon of Miss Snobber and became delightfully intimate with many of the other habitués.

There were young Mr. and Mrs. Ego, Miss Feel I. Could, Mr. Hearmetalk, Comte and Comtesse Risqué des plus Risquéest, Mrs. Solo-Mio, her daughter Temperamenti Solo-Mio, Miss Vague Socialistus, Mr. Koming Poet, spirited Mr. Medium, Mrs. Schreechum (Miss Prima Donna that was), several of the well-known Bore family, Miss Budding Genius (who is making her début this fall), her

brother, Ailing Genius, her older sister, Miss Understood Genius, Mr. Author Ity, D.K.S.O.M., Miss Snob Snobber (cousin of the hostess) and many others, not omitting Mr. Tearitdown and Mr. Patch-itup.

Upon my first appearance at the Debate and Inquiry Club I made, if I say it myself, a really stupendous impression. I spoke, as Miss Snobber had requested that I should, upon the relation of *The Life of the Bat* to the Irish Question, and did so in a most fascinating and ingenious manner, demonstrating clearly how the innate, irrepressible, inordinate and irresponsible desire of bats to blink corresponds exactly and very miraculously with the unalterable, unabatable, and unfathomable determination of Celts toward succeeding.

“As the bat is to its blinkers, so the Celt is to his schemes,” were my concluding

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words, and I got it directly from Miss Feel I. Could afterward that this sentence would henceforth and forever be graven indelibly upon her heart. Then and there Miss Feel I. Could and I indulged in an intimate conversation. We sat side by side upon the many-pillowed divan of Miss Snobber's salon and she disclosed to me the very marrow of her soul.

Miss Feel I. Could is a languorous beauty. Her movements are slow and absorbingly graceful. Her eyes burn with a consuming passion — a passion, she told me, for TRUTH. Her hair has been permanently waved and falls in broken wisps upon her low, exquisitely whitened forehead. Sometimes she wears a hair-net, but this is seldom.

"Always," whispered Miss Feel I. Could into my entranced and quivering ear — "always, Miss Wouldbe, I have *longed* to write — have agonized to write

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— have felt that I *could* write — but have not had the time!”

“Ah, Miss Feel I. Could,” I cried, “Genius must brush aside all obstacles, must plunge itself wholly into the vital essence of Individualism wherein only it can create in untrammelled freedom!”

Miss Feel I. Could sighed, and clasping her head in her hands gazed abstractedly upon me.

“Always — always —” she repeated tragically, “I have felt that I could write.”

“Then you must tear yourself away from other duties, you must give yourself to Art as a high sacrifice upon its altar, you must remember the claims of posterity upon you and not cruelly deny, to generations as yet unborn, the fruit of your intellect!”

“Oh, Miss Wouldbe, you are so eloquent, so kind — but really I cannot give up important duties — even for Art. I

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often think, Miss Wouldbe, that after all it is the little things of life that are important — that it is the *little* things, you understand — that really count. Therefore I am willing to suffer, to deprive myself of self-expression, to subdue my ardent ‘Will to Power,’ to give up, in a word, becoming as great as I feel I could if I wished — so that the *little things* of life may not, in my case, be neglected.”

Her unselfish idealism greatly touched me.

“Today,” she went on, “has been crammed full with little things — those dear, customary little things of existence that so many despise — an appointment at the manicurist’s, a simple luncheon of six covers at the Ritz, the fatiguing routine of choosing a new motor, of buying a bunch of orchids, of a visit to the horse-show, the necessity of calling at the jeweler’s for my pearls, and of deciding what

dress I should wear for dinner — these, my dear Miss Wouldbe, these are the ‘little things’ I perform because I feel that I should and that, therefore, I must; but, by many, these are neglected in the pursuit of Art.”

I looked yearningly into her eyes.

“Ah, if I also might possess your simplicity and self-effacement!” I exclaimed, transported. “But my way is sealed. My genius is unleashed, I cannot retrace my steps!”

At that moment up came Comtesse Risqué smoking a cigarette, and accompanied by Miss Snob Snobber, who was explaining how she positively could not help snobbing snobs.

“Vulgar people,” said Miss Snob Snobber, “would rush after you, Comtesse, because of your title — I am not vulgar. I admit, confidentially, that I am extremely well-born — but I detest snobs. After

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all, Comtesse, our claim to the respect of others — our titles — should be computed entirely upon an intellectual basis — do you not agree?"

Comtesse Risqué agreed. "But I can see you are refined," she added.

Miss Snob Snobber nodded.

"Of course. It takes one who is herself refined to discover refinement in another. I am not like the majority of people, Comtesse Risqué, I am a Child of Culture. I am an aristocrat, yet I am not a snob. Almost everyone, Comtesse, is a snob of one kind or another. But I am not, I abhor snobs."

Just then Mr. Author Ity, D.K.S.O.M., who was to address the meeting that afternoon, stood up suddenly behind the speakers' table and stared about in his usual dreamy, dazed fashion until everyone stopped talking.

Mr. Author Ity is, as you doubtless

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know, the most inclusive scientist of our age. He it is whom the greatest universities of the world have showered with degrees and honors of every description. He it is who has disentangled, once-and-for-all, the conflicting conceptions of mankind upon Life, Death and the Hereafter.

In Mr. Author Ity's book, *The Riddle of Riddles*, everything is explained — explained so clearly that an infant in arms, on perusing the hallowed pages, would gurgle with delight. In fact Mr. Author Ity expresses the opinion that there will come a day when the intellect of man will spring full-blown at birth into perfection; and the sensing of his undying manuscript by infantile but prodigious minds is therefore not merely possible, but indisputable probability.

In his book Mr. Author Ity plunges alone and unterrified into the dark and sepulchral depths of antiquity. He

plunges much farther than anyone else. He plunges miles and miles and disappears into the time when "the world began to cool" and the first "cellular physico-chemical morula Protoplasm" happened. Nobody else was there when it happened except Mr. Author Ity, so nobody else knows anything about it. He tells you *exactly* what he saw. If you do not believe him you had better not say so, as Mr. Author Ity has a terrible temper and becomes dreadfully excited and put out if you will not admit that he was on the world when it began to cool, and that he discovered the first cellular physico-chemical morula Protoplasm.

Mr. Author Ity also explains precisely how the trees and the flowers and the animals and the people in the world happened. They all happened, he says, by mistake — or by Chance. But after they had made mistakes often enough to be-

come a chicken or a yellow daisy or a hyena they went on growing by "Survival of the Slickest" and "Unnatural Deflection."

Mr. Author Ity is absolutely positive about this. He becomes wild with rage if anyone contradicts him. He feels that the first "cellular physico-chemical morula Protoplasm" has confided in him and in no one else. He is determined to keep up the intimacy.

He loves to narrate what happened after the Protoplasm happened, but cannot bear to discuss what happened *before* his Protoplasm happened. When forced to answer, however, he replies that the world happened before the Protoplasm happened; and if questioned further as to what happened before the world happened, declares that other worlds happened; but if for a moment you forget yourself and ask what made the other

worlds happen, Mr. Author Ity becomes livid with fury, dashes into his laboratory, and experiments upon the ultimate point of fusion between Matter and Thought.

Mr. Author Ity's book is really marvelous, as he himself has so often said. He never tires, in fact, of impressing upon his acquaintances the peculiar benefits to be derived from a careful perusal of it, so that now, when I saw that he was about to address the guests in Miss Snobber's Salon, I felt certain that his opening remarks would contain at least a brief allusion to the *Riddle of Riddles*. I was not mistaken.

Mr. Author Ity waited until a deathly silence prevailed and then began:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, my intellectual coterie, my beloved companions in Art and the Sciences, I have been requested by our gifted hostess to explain to you, today, the nature of my recent exper-

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iments and discoveries in the province of chemistry. But before taking up these subjects I wish to say a few words about my recent book — *The Riddle of Riddles* — which is now in its nine hundred and eightieth edition, and which has been everywhere acclaimed as the ‘most insidious, the most immoral and the most agnostic work of the twentieth century.’

“To these words of commendation, and to your own intimate knowledge of the book, I need scarcely, I realize, add words of my own. To do so, moreover, were hardly becoming on my part. Nevertheless I feel it my duty to state that if, by any unbelievable chance, there is one among us who has not yet read this work of genius, to him the entire spirit and tone of the Modern Age will be wholly unintelligible, and he will be unable to grasp, with any comprehensive power, the momentous issues of the twentieth century.

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“Genius, ladies and gentlemen, is always recognized by its possessor. One cannot possess genius and remain unaware of the fact. Therefore I admit that I am and have ever been aware of my own unusual talents, and, knowing the inestimable value of my works, and being of a generous, open-hearted nature, I do not wish you to be deprived of their beauty and wonder. I feel, indeed, about my *Riddle of Riddles* as poignantly as Friedrich Nietzsche felt about his masterful conceptions. Referring to his *Zarathustra* Mr. Nietzsche remarked, ‘I allow no one to pass muster as knowing that book unless *every single word therein has at some time wrought in him a profound wound, and at some time exercised on him profound enchantment.* Then and not *till* then can he enjoy the privilege of participating, reverently, in the halcyon element from which that work is born,

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in its sunny brilliance, its distance, its spaciousness, its certainty.'

"There you have it, ladies and gentlemen, in his exact words, and as Nietzsche felt toward his *Zarathustra*, so I feel, I must confess, toward my *Riddle of Riddles*. It is a magnificent work; and I repeat that unless each separate word therein has left upon your soul a canker, or at the very least a large boil, you cannot participate in its discourse."

I watched the attentive faces of the listeners. Comtesse Risqué, the Solo-Mios, the Bores, and Mrs. Screechum had not, I knew, read the book. No doubt they regretted, now, not having visited upon their souls this canker. A soul-canker is *always* an asset and often an impulse toward original creation (if you know what I mean).

Mr. Author Ity paused for a moment, allowing the full import of his words to

sink deeply into the vacant minds of his audience, and then went on:

“We are now in a position to undertake a brief description and summary of my latest discoveries, and if you will be so good as to draw your chairs a little closer I will give you some intimate and Unpublished Details concerning the formation, growth, and final destiny of a particular specimen of the first cellular physico-chemical Protoplasm.”

Eyes brightened with anticipation, hands sought hands convulsively. Miss Solo-Mio powdered her nose with trembling fingers, while Mr. Patchitup and Mr. Tearitdown became pale with excitement.

We all realized that Mr. Author Ity was about to tell us a *Secret of the Universe*.

IV

The *Intellectuals*

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MR. AUTHOR ITY ran his delicate fingers over his bald head, tore off his necktie and collar, and in a voice hoarse with emotion, began:

“Picture to yourselves, ladies and gentlemen, picture to yourselves this tiny planet of ours hurtling, interminable ages gone, through clouds of dense and dripping vapor. Picture to yourselves this planet a smoldering, barren rotundity revolving at terrific speed and exhaling the most poisonous and life-destructive of gases. Then picture to yourselves, a few million years later, this heated globe

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cooled at last by the influence of its encircling clouds to that psychological temperature necessary for the spontaneous generation of life.

“Ah, ladies and gentlemen, you are present with me at that moment of Supreme Destiny, you are about to witness, with me, the birth of that most ingenious and remarkable of my discoveries — the cellular physico-chemical morula Proto-plasm! A tiny liquid drop it is, of a slightly yellowish tint, containing, as I have so ably and often demonstrated, the myriad elements of self-nourishing, self-reproducing life. From this minute speck, ladies and gentlemen, we ourselves, together with all other animate forms, are derived!”

Mr. Author Ity mopped his perspiring forehead and glanced triumphantly at Miss Snobber, who had been, I observed, extremely restless during the discourse.

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Now, leaping to her feet, she confronted him, her bosom heaving and her eyes flashing with resentment.

“How dare you!” she cried, “how *dare* you, Mr. Author Ity, assert that I am descended from a morula Protoplasm? Feckless, stupid ass! The blood of the Pilgrims flows in my veins — I cannot, I will not endure such impudence! Yellow liquid indeed!”

And Miss Snobber became crimson with anger. Mr. Author Ity, too, was no less upset.

“You are!” — he cried — “I repeat it, you are, were, and will be but a cellular physico-chem — ”

“Stop!” shrieked Miss Snobber, “stop! Utter another word and you will never enter this door again. Do you not know,” she continued more calmly, “that all is spirit — that all is SOUL?”

“Wrong!” exclaimed Mr. Author Ity.

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“Nothing is Soul. On the contrary, *all is Matter!*”

For one terrifying moment I feared that Miss Snobber would hurl a large Japanese vase at Mr. Ity, but she recollected herself just in time, whispering to me as she did so — “valuable vase — Fifth Century — given me by Mysterio, eminent psychic.” Then turning to Mr. Ity she said:

“All is Soul. Matter does not exist. I do not exist. You do not exist. No one exists, Mr. Author Ity, but as we appear in the immaterial extension of intellect. Is not this so?” she inquired, appealing to us all.

“Yes, yes,” we answered unanimously, wondering what Miss Snobber could mean.

Mr. Ity sat down weakly and listened.

“Life,” said Miss Snobber, “exists but in the mind. Life is a dream, a mental

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conception — a ruffling of the abstract molecules of the brain — and nothing more. This table, these chairs — all the furniture in this room — yes, and the room itself and everything in it including you, my guests, and myself, all this does not in reality exist.

“There is no reality. The word reality itself is a myth. The world is a myth. Everything lives only in our imagination and perishes with it. Appearances are deceiving. Nothing is but what is not (as Will Shakespeare was wont to remark). Intellect, Spirit, Soul — these are the only realities!”

So saying, Miss Snobber attempted to sit down, but the chair, by some mischance, had been removed in the interim, and she therefore sat forcibly and swiftly upon the floor, thus causing herself no little irritation and amazement and (I doubt not) several bruises.

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“A pity,” observed Mr. Author Ity, “that your imagination, dear Miss Snobber, was so hard.”

Miss Snobber disregarded the remark and, rising with dignity, said:

“I propose, ladies and gentlemen, that we hold open debate upon this vital question of life and of the soul. Comtesse, what is your opinion?”

Comtesse Risqué, who had been carrying on a flirtation with Mr. Koming Poet, seemed a trifle bewildered.

“Ah, what do I think? I? I think Life is a little pleasure, a little nuisance — and the Soul — it is no matter.”

“Exactly,” said Miss Snobber. “The soul is no matter.”

“I do not mean that!” cried the Comtesse, “I mean the Soul is no solid — whatever you call — the Soul I mean it no matter to worry!”

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“But Soul is ALL,” repeated Miss Snobber dryly, and with emphasis.

“It no all to me, Miss Snobber. Me, I have body and in body a swelled heart — like we say — the *grande coeur!*” And she smiled meltingly at Mr. Koming Poet, who, gazing abstractedly into space, exclaimed:

“Ah — the soul! You all are wrong — there is but one soul and we possess it in common!”

“What you say?” cried the Comtesse — “we have your common soul —?”

“That is but his theory,” explained Miss Snobber. “He cannot prove it. No one can prove anything and there is not anything that can be proved — which is absolute proof that we live merely in imagination.”

“Oh, *Dieu!* If we can not prove, how you prove that — eh? What use to argue?”

“Argument stimulates the intelligence,”

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said Miss Snobber, "and since intelligence is our being, argument stimulates being."

"The question," said Mr. Hearmetalk, who had been unusually quiet, "resolves itself into this — *are we alive?*" And he glanced delightedly from one to another of the controversialists, feeling that he had put the matter in a nutshell and was extremely clever.

"*Are we alive, and, if so, what is life?* or, put more delicately still, if *not* so — what is life?" And he rubbed his little hands together determined to contradict anything that was said.

"But I *know* I am alive!" exclaimed Comtesse Risqué.

"You know nothing," snapped Miss Snobber. "It is impossible to *know* anything. Very likely we have been dead centuries and are not aware of it."

A slight murmur of dismay arose. It

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is disconcerting even to *Intellectuals* to be informed that they are quite, quite dead.

“Of course,” said Miss Snobber, “you remember Dostoevsky’s works — they are imbued with precisely this philosophy — *Am I Alive? Am I Alive? or Am I Dead?* he reiterates continually through the lips of his great characters — but has no means of ascertaining. Ah me! it is the unanswerable riddle of existence!”

And two large tears emerged from Miss Snobber’s eyes and impelled (perhaps by the force of gravity) rolled down her cheeks.

“The question,” said Mr. Author Ity, “together with all other questions evolved from undue but necessary contraction and expansion of the brain units of past, present and future generations, has been satisfactorily answered in My Book. Life is merely a resultant of the multiplication

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of the cells of the first cellular physico-chemical morula Protoplasm, and your soul, dear Miss Snobber, is simply an interesting sensation produced by the attraction and repulsion of electrons in the nerve fibres of your anatomy."

"Trash-and-nonsense," said Miss Snobber.

"Have we not then," cried Temperamenti Solo-Mio, piteously, "the right to call our souls our own?"

"What *is* right?" asked Mr. Ego, glancing furtively toward his wife, who observed, "Seldom you, Mr. Ego," with much conviction.

"There is no right!" said Koming Poet. "And there is no wrong! Beauty alone is our guide and law. But of course," he added, "the masses are unable to appreciate Beauty."

"Surely there is a little right and a little wrong," said Mr. Patchitup, "although



"Am I alive? or am I dead?" demanded Miss Snobber

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Beauty should be, I admit, the Law of our Nature."

"Certainly there is no 'right,' " shouted Mr. Tearitdown — "and there is no Beauty, either! Everything is decidedly wrong!"

"Including Mr. Tearitdown," murmured Mr. Patchitup.

"What is Beauty?" went on Mr. Tearitdown. "No one can say — no one can agree. Beauty, therefore, is not. There is no Beauty in a World of Evil!"

"Rather," yelled Mr. Koming Poet, "there is no Evil in a World of Beauty!"

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed Miss Snobber, "we must not allow our debate to become too personal, too heated — we must maintain our spirits on a level plane of dispassionate conjecture."

Miss Vague Socialistus jumped suddenly to her feet.

"Down with Beauty!" she shouted.

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“Down with Evil! Down with Good! Down with Souls! Down with Life!” And evidently deciding that she should go down herself, ran out of the room and down the stairs, slamming the door behind her.

“There is much value in her suggestion,” remarked Mr. Tearitdown. “I would gladly help her knock the world to pieces, but she refuses my plans for reconstruction.”

“Oh dear, oh dear,” wailed Mrs. Screechum, “what *are* we coming to? Violence walks abroad — Art is strangling. Only yesterday I sang at the Cosmopolitan and not one hand — you will scarcely believe it — not *one* hand was raised in applause!”

Miss Snobber shook her head sorrowfully and everyone did likewise.

“Perhaps you will sing for us now,” she suggested. And after sufficient urg-

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ing, Mrs. Screechum condescended to screech.

I saw then that she had been right. Art was most certainly strangling — or perhaps it was just Mrs. Screechum.

V

The *Intellectuals*

VALUE VALUES

V

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VALUE VALUES

MISS R. U. RICH, well known in hunting circles, lay back upon her wicker chair and sipped her tea thoughtfully. It was afternoon. The Richs always had their tea served in the tiny rustic summer-house on the lawn overlooking the graveled walks, riotous flowers, and pulsing fountains of the huge garden. It was a charming spot. Miss Rich and I had become great friends since the publication of my *Sonnet to the Moon*.

Scarcely a day passed that I did not see her. Miss Rich is wonderfully well read. She has read everything. It is simply

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impossible to find anything that she has not read. Even when I mentioned Marcus Aurelius she declared that he was a "coming author." Our conversation is Books, Ideals, and the Advisability of Marriage.

Miss Rich possesses an absorbing passion for the discussion of Marriage. We discuss it tirelessly. We turn it upside-down, inside-out, backward, sideways, and roll it over and over.

Miss Rich has a hooked nose, red hair, and wears spectacles. She is an heiress, and haunted by the dread that she will be pursued for her money. As yet no one has pursued her for anything. Miss Rich herself does all the pursuing. She pursues a millionaire by the name of I. M. Richer, feeling that I. M. Richer, alone of all men, does not need any cash. She also feels that she, alone of all women, needs I. M. Richer.

“One can do *so* much good with wealth,” she confided to me. “So few rich people employ their wealth for the benefit of others. But I — my whole life is one supreme act of *giving*! I give dances, teas, garden fêtes, bridge parties, balls and dinners. . . . I do not believe in hoarding. The thought is repulsive. I give and I give — but still I know that my life is incomplete. I know that I should marry. Only through suffering, Miss Wouldbe, can we attain the Ideal. I am willing to sacrifice my talents,” she admitted, “for love.”

According to Miss Rich’s music teacher (who is paid a fabulous sum) she possesses great talent for music. According to her painting teacher (who is no less adequately recompensed) she is a genius at painting, and could, if she wished, startle the world. She startles it anyway. Miss Rich “works” twenty minutes daily be-

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fore her easel and fifteen minutes daily before her piano. The results are amazing. She can turn all the great musical compositions into ragtime and can paint a Madonna that looks like a black cat or a piece of peppermint candy.

Once, in a burst of unselfish enthusiasm and appreciation of her wasting gifts, she declared that only in Greenwich Village could she realize her artistic self. To Greenwich Village, therefore, she went, accompanied by three maids, a butler, cook, waitress and chauffeur, and established herself in Bohemian quarters a la "simple" Bohémienne.

The servants dined sumptuously at home in the apartment, but Miss Rich, in a frantic quest for "atmosphere," smothered in Bohemian restaurants, choked over Bohemian dishes and mingled indefatigably with Bohemians of every description. She had never realized, before, how many ge-

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niuses there were. The place swarmed with geniuses. From fat, wild-eyed waiters to anæmic, studiously dreamy girls just out of college every one was a genius. The novelty of genius wore off. Miss Rich came home. Her talents languished. The Pursuit of Literature and of Mr. I. M. Richer occupied her time. She was not a "New Woman." Marriage, she held, was the female's ultimate destiny.

Sometimes Mr. I. M. Richer was inveigled into the Rich household. He is a small young man with dull blue eyes, a girlish complexion, and a weakness for yellow motor cars. During the war he was a Rear Admiral on his father's yacht. He was coming, Miss Rich informed me, that very afternoon to tea — and come he did, magnificently, in his brilliant roadster with a carnation in his buttonhole and Mr. Ath Lete at his side.

Ath Lete is a middle-aged boy whose

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main vice is chronic and undiminishable health. In his youth he habitually flunked every examination (except the physical) at School and College and was as habitually reinstated by the agonized lamentations which issued unanimously upon these occasions from the football coaches. Since then Ath Lete has scrupulously attended to the development of his muscles. Muscles got him an education, so muscles, he argued, could get him everything else — and they did. They got him Mr. Richer as a bosom friend. They got him (through his great love of Mr. Richer) a summer at Newport and a winter at Palm Beach. They got him polo coats, polo ponies, golf clubs, tennis racquets, cocktails and admiration.

He strode Apollo-like on his healthy way, mingling condescendingly with titles, millionaires, and *Intellectuals*, remembering always that he was of the manly, rug-

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ged type, and never allowing his sunburn to wear off. This sunburn was his chief pride and delight. He would lie upon the beach at Newport for hours acquiring it and, upon the slightest intimation of its disappearance in winter, would rush southward on the Florida Express. He may be seen every February-and-March at Palm Beach, prone on the seashore. It is a glorious sunburn. It is the envy of office-plodders, the joy of women.

It endeth not below his shirt

(As many sunburns do);

From head to toe

All of us know

He is of copper hue.

His sunburn does not sting or itch,

It blisters not a bit —

That reddish shine

Girls call “divine” —

It makes Ath Lete a hit.

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He strode forward now, his arm in Richer's, and was beautifully rugged and manly as he shook hands with us and folded himself gracefully upon the grass.

"Mighty hot," he observed, "bully day for tennis and a swim."

(The Richs' domain boasts a swimming pool, but Miss Rich did not rise to the occasion.)

"How will you have your tea?" she inquired.

"Don't want any, thanks. Never eat between meals — secret of perpetual youth, you know," and he smiled engagingly.

"Athy won the men's doubles at Newport this summer," said Richer — "I was playing with him."

"Really?" exclaimed Miss Rich. "How wonderful!"

"Oh, that isn't anything," said Ath

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Lete, biting a blade of grass. "Do you play tennis, Miss Rich?"

Miss Rich faltered. "No, I — well, I play a little — I've played twice."

Mr. Ath Lete looked pained. "You don't know what you miss," he said. "Why, I couldn't live — I couldn't *exist* — without exercise!"

His eyes wandered to Mr. Richer's puny limbs and back again to his own, with satisfaction. "Just look what it does for me!" he exclaimed.

I looked. It was a pity that it had not done more.

"The way Americans live makes me sick," he continued. "Money — money — that's all they care about. Spend days in an office trying to get money and die young. There's the typical American business man for you. But *I* say — keep yourself in trim and let money go hang! By the way, Richer, how about that check?"

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"I brought his horse in No. 1 in the California races last month," he explained, turning to me.

Mr. Richer looked upset. "Why, Ath — thought you charged that polo coat up to me."

"So I did, old man — said you wanted to give me a birthday present — didn't you? Well, no use discussing it here. Have to remind him of his little presents!" he added, laughing.

Richer joined in rather weakly. I saw that he was gazing inquiringly at Mr. Ath Lete's London shoes. Possibly they had been a Christmas gift.

"Yes," said Mr. Ath Lete, "vulgar, I call it — vulgar the way American men go after that dollar. I don't blame wives for complaining they're left too much alone — don't blame 'em a bit. I'd complain, too, if I were a wife. Hell of a way to treat a wife! No work for me while

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I'm young — time enough for work when you're too old to do anything else — eh, Miss Wouldbe?"

"From the point of view of the Artist," I said primly, "I disagree with you. The Artist, Mr. Ath Lete, must struggle continually, whether he wishes it or no, toward the realization of his temperament — struggle toward the evanescent, the unattainable, the ideal!"

"Humph," said Mr. Ath Lete. "But you got two hundred dollars for your *Sonnet to the Moon*."

"Miss Wouldbe is a genius," explained Miss Rich.

Ath Lete looked grieved.

"I suppose I am," I admitted, "I cannot help it."

"No," said Mr. Ath Lete, "But it's a confounded shame!"

It was his daring manner of speech, be it known, together with his sunburn, that

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had gained him, in the first place, admittance to the Society of *Intellectuals*; but this was a little too much. Evidently he did not appreciate this Society in which, by our leave, he moved.

"I consider it far from shame," I observed acidly, "to be intellectual."

The situation was tense; Miss Rich looked anxious. Mr. Richer bit his finger nails. But Mr. Ath Lete appeared wholly unconscious of the seriousness of his blunder. Already he was thinking of something else.

"It's a bully day," he hinted, "for tennis and a swim!"

VI

The *Intellectuals*

CREATE WITH FRENZY

VI

The Intellectuals

CREATE WITH FRENZY

AILING GENIUS wrote, he told me, "because he must." There was a power that "only the elect may feel," an urge — a stimulus in his soul toward original creation that fired his blood and drove him, staggering, toward the IDEAL. It is impossible to discover, by questioning Ailing Genius, the precise nature of this IDEAL.

The ideals of Ailing Genius have not, very probably, any nature at all. Nevertheless, Ailing continues to stagger toward them. In the morning he staggers out of bed into the ideal of a bath; and all day he

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staggers between the ideals of the club and the Ritz-Carlton; and in the evening he staggers home about 2 A. M.

He writes only when the "spirit moves him." What spirit moves him I do not know, but it must certainly be an evil one. It moves him about once a week and generally when he is at a dinner, or at the club — always, at least, when surrounded by friends.

Then he will either slink away like a lost soul, almost unnoticed and entirely unwept, into the seclusion of his rooms, or else the "spirit," happening to descend upon him with unusual violence, "moves" him with equal rapidity and Ailing, clutching his hair or his hat as the case may be, wild-eyed and determined, rushes frantically from the presence of the common weal to "dip (as he phrases it) into the eternal element of genius."

He never dips far enough — or else per-

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haps (as he himself explains) his readers are incurably stupid.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that Ailing's creations at first convey, to the reader's mind, an absolute blank. He has read me many of his poems and even I, who of all persons am uniquely gifted in intelligence, even I am unable to decipher their meaning. Neither, it seems, can Ailing. So there the poems stand, "insoluble and glorious as the riddle of the Sphinx" (to quote their author).

"It came to me," said Ailing, referring to his *Salutation to the Sun*, "in a burst of radiance, a swirl of star dust, a dizzy, rushing torrent of images, words, colors — I wrote and wrote — scarce knowing what — and there it lies!"

It "lied," I knew, in every line. The sun had never, to my knowledge, been observed "leaping, swearing, and singing"

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from cloud to cloud as Ailing asserted positively that it did.

See! See! Look! Look!

Behold the Sun

Leap swearing, singing,

From cloud to cloud!

Its yellow blood

Drips like a flood

Out of its heart.

Red roses, asparagus stalks,

Apartment houses, caterpillars,

Tomato cans, newspapers,

Wooden ladders, cows,

Flannel underwear, antelopes,

Violins, pencil sharpeners, pumice stones,

And fleas —

On all! On all!

Watch the Sun-blood fall!

See! See! Look! Look!

Brown and lavender,

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*Purple and green,
Violet and crimson,
Blue and black,
Clot and mingle,
Swash and tingle
In a trembling
Drop assembling
Of light!
Light! Light! Light! Light!
Damn it!*

This poem was considered, by Ailing and the Critics, his greatest masterpiece. Upon its appearance in one of the Leading Periodicals it immediately aroused a storm of enthusiasm. Ailing received every morning in his mail from twenty to thirty dozen letters from admirers who implored him to confide to them the Inner Significance of the *Salutation to the Sun*.

Had he intended to picture the Sun as

“blind force” ruling the universe? Had he implied the struggle of humanity against propulsion by the “Unknown?” Had he wished to startle the mortal brain out of its groove of accustomed dullness and saturate it in a synthesis of color? If so, why? And if not so, why not? Or did the sun represent the Soul of Man, sufficient unto itself, defying Fate? Or perhaps the sun did not represent anything? And what of the tomato cans, wooden ladders, fleas, pencil sharpeners, caterpillars and the rest? They would die, groaned his admirers, if he refused to answer. But he did answer.

“My meaning,” he said, “I cannot directly divulge. It is mystic, sacred, inviolable. He who seeks it truly, who is in tune, as I am, with the Infinite, whose soul remains uncramped, whose senses vibrate to Beauty — *he* will know my meaning.”

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After that almost everybody understood.

Sometimes Ailing felt the need of Atmosphere. He pursued it relentlessly. Once he spent three weeks in an insane asylum to analyze, he said, the human mind. (His doctor said differently.) And once he spent a week in prison to get in touch, he said, with suffering. (The warden said he had been touched for too much bail.) And always he came forth reeking with Atmosphere.

"It is useless to write," he claimed, "without Atmosphere. Atmosphere is everything. It is the essence of genius. The untalented can never acquire it. Let us take, for example, a brick. A brick is red. A brick is rectangular. In describing a brick the common man will speak of a brick. His ignorance is pitiable! Who wishes to read of a brick as it is? No one, I say, absolutely no one! But who does

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not wish to read of a brick as it is not? *Bricks?* Fiddlesticks! But *sun-washed, purpled, concentrated atoms!* That, Miss Wouldbe, is Atmosphere.

“Popularity?” cried Ailing. “No! I am not a popular writer! I will not lower myself! I will not court the vulgar taste! I will not drag my genius in the mire! Let them smile if they wish — let them ignore — let them refuse to buy my books! It makes no difference.

“I am, Miss Wouldbe, above the desires of men. Misunderstood? Yes, and ‘to be misunderstood is to be great.’ I am incapable of envy, of bitterness. I realize that I am a soul apart — a soul elevated to the lonely performance of a high task. Future generations will weep over my grave. It is a pity that they do not weep over me now — but I do not complain. I am content. They are idiots.

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“Editors? Bah! They are more stupid than the rest. They know nothing of Art. They are afraid of the new. ‘Read this,’ they say, giving me a novel, ‘and try something on the same order!’ Fools! Genius will not ape! Genius will not be commanded! I hurl the volumes in their faces and stride scornfully from the room. Perhaps I should not be so hasty — but my temperament, Miss Wouldbe — my temperament sometimes gets the better of me. I am *so* temperamental!” And Ailing sighed.

“The artistic sensibilities,” he explained, “are so highly and delicately organized, so finely poised, that the slightest irritation — an Editor, for instance — disturbs their entire equilibrium. I have always been temperamental. As an infant I used to weep for hours for no apparent reason. My mother has told me this. She has told me that our neighbors on both sides of the

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street moved away — being quite overcome, I suppose, by my perpetual sobs.

“Then as a youngster, Miss Wouldbe, I often lay on the floor, agitated my legs, and howled. This habit which was to many, apparently, strangely annoying, was a natural phase of my high-strung and nervous personality.

“My mother, alone, understood this. ‘Dear child,’ she would invariably exclaim, after my paroxysm had continued for perhaps two hours, ‘dear child, stop crying and I will give you whatever you want.’ And she did. I obtained in this way a pony, an automobile, permission to absent myself whenever I liked from school and many other favors I do not now recall.

“I have often thought, Miss Wouldbe, how necessary it is that a mother should understand her child. The child’s desires should never be restrained — should *never* be denied. It is our childish un-

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gratified desires that, returning in maturity with ten times more force, determine our most ungovernable passions. Passions, Miss Wouldbe, are of course ungovernable *only* when we endeavor to govern them. Personally I have no ungovernable passions.

“The twentieth century has at last recognized the rights of the child. The world has come to agree, with me, that the child’s development should proceed naturally and unaided since the child possesses in himself a kernel of growth and, like a flower of the field, knows what is necessary for its own well-being and happiness.

“How clearly I remember, Miss Wouldbe, a certain summer’s day of my youth when my great-aunt — a venerable old lady of eighty-three years — came to call on my mother. Tea was served in the garden. My great-aunt sat upon a rustic

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chair within arm's-reach of the tea table and showed signs of a marked weakness for cinnamon toast. I, too, like cinnamon toast. I felt that I liked it much more than did my great-aunt. I felt this very intensely. So intensely, in fact, that I took all of the cinnamon toast and put it in my pocket.

“‘Jessabel!’ cried my great-aunt, ‘Ailing has taken all the toast!’ ‘Really?’ said my mother, and then turning to me she added, ‘When you are finished eating it, dear boy, run up to the house and tell Bridget to make you some more.’”

“My great-aunt was enraged. She called me a spoiled brat and left the place in a fury. As she was stepping into her carriage I observed a long ostrich feather in her bonnet which I realized in a twinkling was precisely what I needed to decorate the mane of my pony. Acting, as I maintain children should always act, upon

impulse, I seized this feather, jerked it from the bonnet, and ran away. I learned afterward that my mother had argued for hours in a vain attempt to make my great-aunt perceive the reasonableness of my possessing that feather. The old lady, who was utterly selfish and narrow-minded, could not be made to understand the necessity of my action.

“At last my mother, being unwilling to deprive me of the prize which I had captured with such vim and daring, was obliged to purchase another feather for my aunt — and the old cat did not even thank her for doing it! I tell you this little anecdote, Miss Wouldbe, to illustrate the fact that had I not possessed such a modern parent I would not now be what I am!”

And, glancing at himself in the tall mirror opposite, Ailing smiled with satisfaction.

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"I shudder!" he exclaimed, "fairly shudder with horror to think that, had I been raised by my great-aunt, I would undoubtedly never have been able to attain my unique personality. From infancy to manhood I would have been subjected to tyranny! It is terrible — horrible! And do you realize, Miss Wouldbe, that had I not been allowed to retain that cinnamon toast and that ostrich feather, that I would unquestionably have longed distractedly all my life for ostrich feathers and cinnamon toast? No amount of ostrich feathers and cinnamon toast would ever have satisfied me! I would have bought tons of cinnamon toast — I would have scoured the world for ostrich feathers — and still remained ungratified . . . for it is only at the precise moment of the conception of a desire that that desire can be fully satisfied.

"Fancy the fate that might have been

mine! A whole life rendered incomplete because of cinnamon toast and ostrich feathers! Oh, if parents realized this! But I was saved — I, Miss Wouldbe, have found my highest self. I have found it because I deny myself nothing and am never denied. It is such a simple doctrine. All great things are simple!”

I agreed. Everyone thought Ailing extremely simple.

“It is just this absence of restraint — of any limiting, narrowing influence in my life,” he went on, “that makes my writing so beautiful yet so unintelligible to masses. I preach the *beauty* of all things. I am able to see beauty in a sewer. A piece of mud in the gutter stirs my soul ecstatically, while a garbage can invariably sends me into transports. It is this power of perception that the vulgar cannot comprehend. They cannot believe that there is beauty in a garbage can.

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“What is beauty, Miss Wouldbe? What is sensation? desire? love? hate? life? It is color! Color, and color only. The soul is color. The mind is color. When I think of a person or of an object I visualize them always, Miss Wouldbe, as colors. When I think of you I see a daub of greenish pink interspersed with yellow. When I think of garbage cans I see squares of pure lavender rimmed with white. When I think of poetry I see purple globes speckled with brown. When I think of Poverty I see orange cockroaches.

“Why is this? How do I know! I know only, Miss Wouldbe, that a garbage can presents quite as interesting colors as yourself. Were it not for color nothing would be visible, no one thing would be aware of the existence of the other. I preach a new doctrine. I offer a new religion to the world — *it is color!*”

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“There are so many creeds as it is,” I ventured, “wouldn’t it be wise to wait . . .”

But Ailing shook his head.

“You are ignorant,” he said, “everyone should found a religion. Shall I be outdone by Buddha, Henry VIII, or Mr. Smith the Mormon?”

And, smitten suddenly by his genius, he ran impetuously out of the room.

VII

The *Intellectuals*

ARE SOMETIMES YOUNG

VII

The Intellectuals

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AMONG the most intellectual of *Intellectuals* is the Intellectual Débutante. This bewildering creature is never seen upon the streets until after twelve in the morning, divides her afternoons between dressmaker, manicurist, and tea at the Ritz; and, as the shades of night approach, garbs herself in a vast maze of nothing, pinches her cheeks, powders, disposes of several cocktails and steels herself for the prey.

The ingénue has vanished. There was a time when unsophistication, modesty and innocence were, in the young girl, expected. This foolish notion has been ut-

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terly discarded. The débutantes themselves revolted against it. Fluffy white dresses were cast into the scrap heap; "sweet" evening frocks gave place to "stunning gowns."

The close of the world war was the signal for the Débutante Declaration of Independence. Débutantes in every city large and small came forth in hundreds. They appeared jewel-bestrewn, languorous, intellectual. They smoked, drank, shimmied and snapped their fingers in the faces of those who disapproved. Their declaration of rights if drawn up would, I imagine, read something like this:

"We, the débutantes of 1921, who have been cheated of our birthright — of our natural prerogative to enter Society at the age of eighteen; we who have been (although we gracefully held silence) inexpressibly bored that so many marriageable young men were killed in the war; we

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who pretended as long as it seemed advisable to do so that we understood ideals, national and individual; we who, in a word, have been wilfully deprived of years of enjoyment now intend (and do hereby declare and set our seal in witness thereof) — that we shall have a gloriously good time now, after our own liking. Watch us!”

We did and do. And we see risen triumphant upon the shattered conception of the ingénue — the social phoenix, the Intellectual Débutante! Behold the transformation! She is willowy and pale. Her lips are carmine. She reigns — the Queen of No-where.

Her conversation is startling. She believes in Spiritism, possesses mediumistic powers of her own, finds it impossible to remain alone for more than two consecutive minutes, and must be “doing something” every instant that she is not asleep.

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The most popular of the year's débütantes is, I have heard, little Miss Vamp. She possesses all the requirements of modern popularity — a motor in which to transport her less fortunate acquaintances to and from festivities, a large and independent income, a dull and stylish mother, a good-looking and idiotic brother, unquestioned social position, and a clear understanding of the dogmas of the Innovation Débutante Platform. She is well up on every question of the day — Labor Unrest, the Joyless Sabbath, Prohibition, Divorce and of course Spiritism. She is so well up on these things that she could not get down to them if she tried.

Miss Vamp is also, she will tell you, an untiring reader. Not a new novel escapes her. She devours every new romance with avidity. *The Faithless Love* she declares her favorite. She enjoys especially agreeing with Mr. Welz disagreeing with him-

self. She will admit ignorance of nothing — but her passion — her absorbing passion — is Spiritism.

“Oh, Miss Wouldbe!” she exclaimed to me, “Spiritism is the New Revelation — the Newer Testament of the Newest Age! If you want to be in the swim you really must know something about it!

“Spiritism,” said Miss Vamp, “simply *cannot* be denied any longer. Of course you read *Edmond*, Miss Wouldbe? Or that remarkable book by Sir Spirit Itis entitled *The Gum Shoe*? No? Well, listen to this . . .”

Miss Vamp went over to the library table, and picking up the work in question, opened it.

“Just listen to this, Miss Wouldbe!” she cried, “and judge whether we aren’t standing upon the brink of a New Error! . . . ‘I found the medium sitting in a darkened room, her head clasped in her

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hands, her eyes searching the Unknown. 'Ah, those luminous eyes! They seemed to pierce the cruel veils of mystery!

“ ‘When I entered she did not glance toward me but motioned me to a chair opposite and began to speak in a low, stirring, sing-song fashion. Her voice vibrated strangely in the dimness. It was the Incantation to the World of the Dead.

“ ‘Gradually I was able to catch the drift of the words . . . “If there be any spirits present come and declare yourselves . . . if there be any spirits present speak unto us . . . if there be any spirits . . .”

“ ‘Suddenly the table upon which she had been leaning leapt into the air with remarkable agility and began to dance gleefully up and down. At the same time the pictures on the walls swung rhythmically to-and-fro, the chairs balanced each upon one leg, the ornaments

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upon the mantelpiece jumped off and rolled about the floor and there came the faint but unmistakable sound of string instruments played, with much feeling, out of tune.

“ ‘The reader may judge of my amazement, and when in the midst of these wonders the Medium began to speak in the voice of my departed and beloved butler, Simon Bryce, I tore my hair and wept.

“ ‘Ever since his death I had searched unavailingly for my gum shoes. I had searched my house from garret to cellar, had spent all my spare time peering beneath sofas, stoves, beds, chairs, and into dark closets and corners. But all in vain! My gum shoes had vanished. I knew that I would catch cold, yet it was against my principles to buy another pair and besides (this is very remarkable and I would ask the reader to mark and remember this point particularly) — *somehow I felt that*

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sometime, somewhere, I would find those gum shoes!

“ ‘Imagine my delight, therefore, when this Medium who could, I am certain, have known next-to-nothing of my attachments to my butler or to my gum shoes, began to speak in the following strain. I here reproduce faithfully the conversation:

(Spirit) ‘Sir Spirit Itis — Sir Spirit Itis . . . are you theah?’

(Myself) ‘I am.’

(Spirit) ‘This is Simon Bryce . . . your butler . . . once . . . excuse me . . . communication is difficult . . . I have not yet . . . (silence) . . . I long for cigarettes. We have no pipes here . . .’

(Medium) ‘Tell us about Heaven.’

(Spirit) ‘We have Nabisco wafers for breakfast . . . you must not think . . . we do not eat . . . yesterday we had

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onions . . . there is a mouse in the room . . .’

(Medium) ‘*Never mind.* Tell us about Heaven.’

(Spirit) ‘I do not like mice. I killed mice when in the flesh . . . mice torture me here . . . it is revenge . . . beware of mice . . .’

(Medium) ‘Is there any question you wish to ask?’ (to me.)

(Myself) ‘*Where are my gum shoes?*’

(Spirit) ‘The ice cream freezer . . . I must go . . . mice . . . mice . . . mice . . . ta ta!’ (Silence.)

The Medium wrenched herself out of her trance and confronted me.

“Well?” she asked.

“It was all true!” I cried brokenly —
“all — all — he loved cigarettes — he killed mice — I will look in the ice cream freezer for my rubbers!”

“‘And dazed and strangely thrilled I

rushed home. I found the ice cream freezer. I thrust my arm far into it — the rubbers were not there. *But two months afterward I found them in the box stall of the stable!*

“ ‘Inexplicable! Inspiring! Every day, since then, I have attended Séances. Marvellous, unrepeatable wonders have I heard — the dead continue to exist — and we have only to offer the Mediums paltry sums to be convinced of the astounding fact.

“ ‘The first week I paid Mme. Pavlino five hundred and thirty-two dollars for getting me into communication with Simon Bryce. The next week I paid her six hundred dollars and three cents for “extending” the contact. I will give Mme. Pavlino, if she asks for it, my last dollar. I feel that I can never again be happy unless I am able to converse daily with the spirit of Simon Bryce.

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“ ‘Poor man! I fear he is not happy. He continues to talk about mice and yesterday he wailed dreadfully. He wailed so hard that the Medium became quite hoarse. He also said that I did not pay the Medium enough money. He asked whether his association was not worth more to me than six hundred dollars? And then he sobbed. He sobbed so distractedly that the Medium was obliged to interrupt him, for a moment, while she went to fetch a handkerchief.

“ ‘Then I gave her a thousand dollars and he sobbed some more. Today he communicated with me by means of rapping. We had arranged that one rap should mean “yes,” and two raps “no.” The sounds came weirdly out of nowhere, but in the locality of Mme. Pavlino’s right foot. These uncanny rappings are termed by the eminent Spiritualist, Sir Chronic Crooks, “Percussive Sounds.”

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“ ‘A young doctor of my acquaintance — an unbeliever — was with me at the time. All of the Crooks, he said, were interested in Spiritism. My friend was unconvinced by the “Percussive Sounds.” He even intimated that Mme. Pavlino’s toes were double-jointed. The eminent Miss Wolf, he said, happened to possess toes of this variety. He implored Mme. Pavlino to remove her shoe, with which request, very naturally (being a modest creature) she refused to comply. I was humiliated by my friend’s impudence, and Madame — Madame was furious!

“ ‘ “For this insult,” she said, “I must have five hundred dollars more.”

“ ‘I will never again take my friends to hear Mme. Pavlino.’ ”

Miss Vamp paused in her reading and closed the book. “Could *anything* be more convincing?” she cried. “Could anyone

dare sneer at such evidence?" Her eyes flashed.

"Our souls," I agreed, "will soon be physically evident to our senses. Our error is indeed, as Mr. Missinglink reminds us, the error of the Soul. What will the future bring forth? We dare not even surmise! But we know — we are confident — we have reason to believe that never again will gum shoes, umbrellas, gloves, walking sticks, collar buttons or pins be irretrievably lost!"

"Think!" cried Miss Vamp, "just *think*, Miss Wouldbe, what this means! What an enormous step this is toward knowledge of the Hereafter — of the Beyond! Ah, Miss Wouldbe, the Beyond! Think of it!" and she gazed rapturously at the fire tongs.

"Spiritism," she exclaimed, "is, for those who understand it, the great Revealer. Spiritists are one and all, Miss

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Wouldbe, believers in the equality of souls once souls are dislocated from the flesh. Spiritism has modernized the best maxims of the old-fashioned religion — Christianity. We do not define Poverty in the narrow sense of absence of wealth — nor Chastity in the sense of purity of morals, nor Obedience in the sense of submission to laws.

“Mediums are invariably rich, sometimes immoral, and seldom acknowledge *any* law. You see, Miss Wouldbe, the old ideals, while retained in name, are brought entirely up to date. Who need profess the Ten Commandments when a deceased relative, tapping coquettishly upon the window-sill, tells us that they are rot? My own great-uncle did that — and I have not hesitated to break them ever since.”

“How convenient!” I exclaimed.

“Exactly, Miss Wouldbe. Spiritism, you see, always adapts itself to our needs,

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always tells us just what we wish to be told. The spirits always agree with us and so we always agree with the spirits — it is the only intelligent belief!”

Miss Vamp converted me. I had never been able to agree with any religion. Here was a religion that would agree with me.

I embraced it immediately and trust I shall live happily ever after.

VIII

The *Intellectuals*

ABSORB COURSES

VIII

The Intellectuals

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I SAW Miss Cram Itin in the train and sat down beside her. We had not met since our schooldays, yet I knew instinctively, when I looked at her, what she had been doing ever since — she had been taking courses. She had the restless eye, the fidgety manner and the frantic garb of the chronic course-taker. Moreover, she carried a tablet and two textbooks. The signs were unmistakable. Nevertheless I asked.

“What,” I said, “are you doing this winter?”

Miss Cram Itin seemed pleased to see me.

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“Faith Wouldbe!” she cried, “sit right down and let’s compare notes! What am I doing? My dear, I’m taking a course — yes, at the University — in Psychology. Oh, very interesting. Have you ever taken it? Delightful, really delightful — yes, a most attractive subject and the teacher is divine. Young, curly hair, and such eyes — eyes one cannot forget, Miss Wouldbe, eyes one cannot forget!”

“What an absorbing course it must be!” I said. “I have always longed to study Psychology — also Physiology, Geology, Sociology, Chronology, Astrology, Anthology, Theology, Etymology and Gas Brackets.”

“Gas Brackets!” exclaimed Cram Itin, “How magnetic! I have studied every subject you mentioned, Miss Wouldbe, except Gas Brackets. How stupid not to have thought of it! I will take the course immediately — the Science of Gas Brack-

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ets — or would it be an Art? I shall go to see the Dean of the University about it at once. Maybe you would like to join the class?"

"Ah, Miss Cram Itin," I said, "much as I would like to, I cannot. My life is dedicated to the instinct of creation. I was, I am, I must continue to be a genius!"

"Really?" cried Cram Itin, "How fascinating! How astounding! I took a course upon Genius last spring. A most instructive course, Miss Wouldbe, guaranteed to turn out twenty geniuses a month — I only stayed two weeks. A great pity. But I could not stand the strain. I broke down — yes, entirely — and took a course in Cooking instead. A lovely course, Miss Wouldbe: complete instruction in custards, pies, ices, all varieties of vegetables, meats, preserves, breads, cakes, hashes, candies, salads, salt

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fish, soups, baked beans, dried fruits and pickles.

“No girl in my opinion is prepared for matrimony, Miss Wouldbe, until she has taken this course, together with Child Culture, Sex Hygiene, Evolution, and the Fundamental Necessity of Frequent Divorce. Deprive the girl of knowledge and she assumes the responsibilities of marriage. Personally, Miss Wouldbe, I never intend to marry. But had I not taken the courses in Child Culture, Sex Hygiene, Evolution, and the Fundamental Necessity of Frequent Divorce — heaven knows what I might have done! There was even a time when I might have become engaged. But folly, Miss Wouldbe, vanishes like mist before the sunlight of knowledge! I remain unattached.”

“Tell me,” I urged, “about the courses.”

“There were so many,” said Cram Itin,

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“that I scarcely know where to begin. I have taken twenty whole courses, fifty half courses, and seventy-five quarters. My ambition, Miss Wouldbe, is to know everything that is to be known. I study continually. I am never happy unless I am appropriating wisdom. I realize the immense, the supreme duty of cultivating my mind. I vowed as a small child (hardly out of long clothes) that I would improve my mind — and I *have* improved it.”

I looked earnestly at Miss Cram Itin. There was still room for improvement.

“The last month,” she went on, “I began courses in Wireless Telegraphy, Ethics, Stenography, Forestry and Business Arithmetic — but passed on to Psychology. I intend to confine my studies to Psychology for at *least* ten days. Don’t you think it foolish to attempt too much? I have always claimed that we should de-

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vote our energies to but one thing at a time — *only* one thing.

“Not long ago I ignored this maxim. I took the courses upon Fletcherizing, Hypnotism, First Aid, Short Story Writing and Æsthetic Dancing the same week. But it was an utter failure — Miss Wouldbe, yes — utter. So I confined myself to the Short Story Course for six days and learned the entire theory. I have now only to put pen to paper, Miss Wouldbe, to produce a masterpiece. Yes, indeed, I now have *great* ability.

“What is talent? The knowledge of *how!* This knowledge is quickly acquired by Courses. Have you taken the Course in Futuristic Poetry? Origin? Beauties? Tendencies? Five lectures, three hundred and forty-two dollars and no cents. You *must* take it! Only three hundred and forty-two dollars! Why! It’s a chance in a life-time! I signed for it yesterday.

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The classes begin Monday. Yes, I am giving up Psychology to take advantage of this offer. It is really wicked, Miss Wouldbe, not to avail ourselves of such an opportunity. Did you know that brains are of a sponge-like formation?"

I had not thought my own sponge-like, although I *had* suspected something of the sort about the brain of Miss Cram Itin.

"They are," said Miss Cram Itin, "of a sponge-like formation contained within the cranium, or skull. Mine, I believe, is in my skull — but very probably yours, Miss Wouldbe, is in your cranium. The Textbook states that either locality is correct. There is no cause for anxiety — none at all. The brain, Miss Wouldbe, is divided into a cerebrum, cerebellum, and a medulla oblongata. Isn't it interesting? (And nobody knows who divided it. And nobody knows what a cerebrum is — or

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what a cerebellum is — or what a medulla oblongata ought to be.) Now isn't that fascinating? Everyone *pretends* to know — but no one does. I found that out immediately. The study of Psychology, Miss Wouldbe, is the study of what nobody knows. . . it is an *immense* subject — there are volumes and volumes upon it.

“I just wanted to know something that nobody knew; and now I know nobody knew anything. Yes, fascinating! Fascinating! A brain, Miss Wouldbe, weighs 48 ounces. Just fancy!

“But it is not yet possible to weigh a thought. That, however, will soon be accomplished. Personally I believe that a thought about a cow would weigh more than a thought about a blue corn-flower without leaves. I should say, myself, that a thought about a cow would weigh 19 to 29 pounds, while I am quite certain

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that a thought about a blue corn-flower without leaves would weigh only 2 or perhaps $2\frac{1}{4}$ pounds.

“I differ upon this most strenuously with my teacher. He stubbornly maintains that the corn-flower possessing, as it does, much vibration of the spectrum in its color — blue — would therefore be, when translated into thought, a blue thought. Blue thoughts he declares are intrinsically heavier than yellow thoughts, and a cow being yellow, the thought of a cow would more than likely, you understand, remain of this hue. Therefore, the blue in the corn-flower would outweigh the yellow in the cow — if you follow the inference. But I contradict his statement. I contradict it flatly!”

“Yet it seems logical,” I murmured.

“Logical? What is Logic? Have you taken, Miss Wouldbe, the Course in Elements of Logic? Its Tone? Composi-

tion? Utility? No? Then you are in no position to speak of Logic!" and she frowned upon me with much disapproval.

"There is another subject that has interested me," I began, endeavoring to turn the conversation, "and I wonder, Miss Cram Itin, whether you can enlighten me upon it — it is Religion. While not myself of a religious twist of mind, I have always derived much pleasure from observing the religious convictions of my friends. A conviction *I* consider merely a sign of weakness — *I*, Miss Cram Itin, believe in everything and nothing."

I paused, feeling that I had expressed myself exceedingly well.

"Everything and nothing!" echoed Miss Cram Itin. "How charming! How sympathetic! How broad! Oh, if the age of intolerance were only truly past! Oh, if all men and women could possess your sublime vastness of vision!"

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I admitted, modestly, that it was indeed a pity that they could not.

"The trifling pygmies bicker continually," I said. "They are forever arguing upon 'Creeds,' 'Canon Law,' 'Popes,' 'Unity,' and a thousand petty problems — but I, Miss Cram Itin, *I* believe in everything and nothing!"

Cram Itin nodded.

"I took a Course upon Religions last Fall, Miss Wouldbe; I know everything about them. I have evolved my own creed. I believe absolutely in Nihilism, Pantheism, Monism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism — anything but Christianity. Christianity, Miss Wouldbe, is too definite. Like Voltaire, I am an Atheistical Deist — if you know what I mean."

I could only guess. But then, so only could Miss Cram Itin.

"We should found this Sect," she said enthusiastically — "*The Everything and*

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Nothing Sect. It would have thousands of supporters. It *already* has thousands, Miss Wouldbe! Why, there is not a man in ten who knows what he believes, and there is not a woman in ten who will not believe anything. Why! It would be superbly easy! It is the attitude of the normal being toward religion! You have put it in a nut-shell."

It was nice to know that I had put this into Miss Cram Itin's head.

Before leaving I expressed the hope that the Course upon Gas Brackets would prove inspiring.

Miss Cram Itin assured me that it could not possibly prove otherwise. "Gas Brackets," she added, "are *so* little understood!"

IX

The *Intellectuals*

STALK CELEBRITIES

IX

The Intellectuals

STALK CELEBRITIES

AH," said Mrs. Stalker sipping her Crème de Menthe pensively, "it is the age of democracy — Miss Wouldbe — of Equality.

"Just fancy! Isn't it interesting? Isn't it thrilling? We are living in an era of change, Miss Wouldbe, immense change. The old institutions are tottering. It is glorious! It is inspiring! Let all Monarchs be assassinated, I say — or done away with one way or another. It may be cruel — but it *is* necessary, Miss Wouldbe — oh yes, quite!

"The poor dear Czar of Russia was an intimate friend of mine — I met him in

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Germany many years ago — ‘Nick,’ I used to say to him — ‘Nick, there is no use keeping up the notion of the divine right of kings — none at all, Nick, mark my words.’

“But he didn’t. And now there he is — as dead as possible! A pity! But absolutely necessary, you know — oh, absolutely! We have made the world safe for Democracy, Miss Wouldbe, and that means it is positively unsafe for anything else, and it remains to be seen, of course, whether Democracy is safe for the world — but come it must. World Democracy! Oh, wonderful, wonderful!”

And finishing the Crème de Menthe, she slipped the waiter a ten-dollar bill, lit a cigarette, and leaned forward confidentially.

“Now that the War is over, Miss Wouldbe, we can admit that Patriotism is only an antique rite, an outworn emo-

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tion, a hollow conception that the intellect of Modern Man normally refuses to accept. In time of conflict it must, of course, be artificially stimulated. It must be administered hypodermically to the Masses — or war would not exist.

“But war, as we all know, is *most* necessary. It is the process adopted by Nature for the correction of over-population. To prevent war, Miss Wouldbe, is to work in direct opposition to Nature and such an attempt is rightly foredoomed to failure. This talk about the prevention of war — I have no sympathy with it. It is sentimental idiocy. I am not in favor of the League of Nations precisely because its provisions might prevent conflict.

“Why, think of it, Miss Wouldbe! Were it not for this last war there would be at this very instant twenty million more men in the world than there are. Twenty million! Horrible, horrible! Individually

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we may like them. Collectively men are insupportable.

“But to return to what I was saying — this is the age of Democracy. Rulers must go. They may conscientiously be stabbed, shot, hanged, poisoned, beheaded, smothered, drowned — electrocuted. Anything is permissible. In certain instances they may be requested to abdicate; or if they *insist* upon remaining they may be allowed to sit upon their thrones, and listen while We talk. On no account, however, should they be permitted to utter a syllable. The thought is preposterous. I shall vote for the Prohibition of Everything. Kings indeed! We are each one of us a King!”

And Mrs. Stalker glared ferociously about. Suddenly, her eyes brightened — she jumped up.

“Why, there is Lieutenant Watch Me, aide to Prince Ivaniski! A charming man! You must meet him, my dear — he

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is a lamb — a perfect lamb!” And rushing forward she captured the lamb by the arm and steered him adroitly to our table, the focus of all eyes.

Lieutenant Watch Me was prevailed upon to join us in a cocktail.

“As you know — we have Prohibition in this country — you do not mind drinking it out of a coffee cup?” asked Mrs. Stalker anxiously.

The Lieutenant did not mind. He said he would not mind drinking it out of a pitcher.

“I cannot imagine why the Government thought it necessary to pass such a law,” said Mrs. Stalker. “Personally, I could see no harm in drinking intoxicants from wineglasses — but apparently that is disintegrating to public morals. Liquor must, by edict of Congress, be served in future in jugs, teapots, kettles, coffee cups, finger bowls, vases and buckets. It

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is absolutely forbidden to use the customary wineglass in hotels, restaurants, or any public place."

"After all, wineglasses hold so little," said the Lieutenant. "No doubt your Congress realized this. A teacup is a more generous and sensible container for a cocktail." And he gazed sorrowfully at the small after-dinner coffee cup in the depths of which his own "orange blossom" snuggled abjectly.

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Stalker, "perhaps you are right. Only yesterday I was speaking to a friend of mine — a lawyer — on the subject. He had just sentenced a wine dealer, he told me, to six months' imprisonment and a fine of five hundred dollars for selling whiskey in goblets. My friend confiscated the whiskey and will sell it to you in barrels. 'Always come to me,' he said, 'when you want barrels of whiskey.'"

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“Delightful,” said the Lieutenant, “what a thoughtful and sympathetic man!”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Stalker, “lots of lawyers are like that.”

“Prince Ivaniski is coming to Philadelphia next week,” said the Lieutenant, after a moment. “He is, as you know, touring the country to thank your open-hearted countrymen for their monetary support. The support has not been given yet, but the Prince feels certain that it will be, when they see him. He is a splendid fellow. So democratic, such a lover of freedom! He does not wish to return to his own country until his father and his two brothers have been assassinated. Only then will his subjects realize that he is an unfettered spirit and grant him the exercise of unlimited power.

“He is very clever. ‘Loot,’ he said to me, ‘I know how to handle my people. I

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know how to gain my rightful ascendancy. I have but to change my title of "Emperor" to that of "Bolshevik" and they will make me Caesar.' Now I call that genius.

"Genius in a statesman, Mrs. Stalker, is but the ability to make your people clamor for what they do not want. That is precisely the intention of Prince Ivaniski. The people do not want Prince Ivaniski — well, Prince Ivaniski wants the people. The people do not want a ruler. Prince Ivaniski wants to rule. Prince Ivaniski resigns his title, proclaims himself Socialist, Bolshevik, Atheist, whatever they will — and refuses to reign. Instantly he is forced upon the throne, flattered, obeyed, adored, simply because he has allowed the masses to talk until they are exhausted, argue until they are bewildered, and kill each other until only a few remain. Then, and then only, will

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they clamor for what they do not want — and what they do not want, in this case, is Prince Ivaniski.”

“Exactly,” said Mrs. Stalker. “I agree with you perfectly. I have met the Prince. I felt immediately that he was a lover of freedom. ‘Mrs. Stalker,’ he said to me, ‘I am a man in the highest sense of the word — I am unguided by any law but my own — if I happened to feel like it, Mrs. Stalker, I would tear out your hair, throttle you, and fling you out of the window!’ I knew that he spoke the truth.”

Lieut. Watch Me nodded. “He would,” he said. “He would ‘speak the truth’ — sometimes.”

“I have prepared an apartment on the ground floor of my home for him,” said Mrs. Stalker. “He promised to visit me when he came to the city. I have had the rooms completely done over in his honor. They have been upholstered in purple,

and the ceilings have been decorated by Martoni with skulls and cross-bones. I hope he will appreciate it."

"Why, Mrs. Stalker!" I exclaimed, "did you not tell me that, in the Age of Democracy, every sovereign should be denied his office?"

Mrs. Stalker was unflustered.

"My dear, yes. But I was speaking in the abstract — according to the general rule. There are exceptions. Every sovereign coming to America is an exception — or else he would not come. The logic is perfectly clear."

It was so clear that anyone could see through it.

"Besides, Prince Ivaniski is a free spirit — and not a king — yet. Certainly I believe in Democracy; certainly, as I have always maintained, sovereigns should be deposed — but in reality, Miss Wouldbe, in *reality*, you understand, this is

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inadvisable. Theory and practice are two parallel lines which never meet. Therefore I intend to entertain Prince Ivaniski. There will be a ball in his honor, a Japanese fête in my gardens, a parade, hundreds of parades. The people have talked so much about Royalty. They are simply dying to see what they have been talking about. Everyone must have a good look — but theoretically, you understand, I am against Prince Ivaniski.”

“And theoretically,” said the Lieutenant, “we approve Democracy.”

“While practically,” I observed, “we disprove our theories.”

At that moment in came Miss Vague Socialistus, preceded by a bowing head waiter and accompanied by Re Form, the leading man in *Strength* — the thrilling problem play of Immorality that was stunning the city.

Mrs. Stalker induced them to sit with

us. Vague Socialistus was evidently enamoured of Mr. Re Form. She watched him, fascinated, and smiled whenever he glanced toward her. Re Form began almost immediately to discuss himself.

“I say it in all modesty, Mrs. Stalker — but it is a fact that I have done more toward elevating the drama than any actor living. I have elevated it, Mrs. Stalker, to the appreciation of the worst thug in my audience. My audience, in fact, is largely composed of thugs. I have brought the Art of the Stage within the comprehension of thugs. I thrill thugs! I appeal to thugs! I transfix thugs! — and my Moral Issues send thugs into ecstasies.

“The thug, Mrs. Stalker, is, as it were, the first rung upon the ladder of Society. I believe in beginning reform in the uttermost depths. I show evil in all its forms. Every act of *Strength*, Mrs. Stalker, reeks with evil — its delight, its fascina-

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tion, its humor. Up to the very last instant of the production, Mrs. Stalker, my audience is made to feel the seduction of it — is made to imagine its advantages, is encouraged to indulge in it.

“But in the last instant — *just* as the curtain is descending — I gather my genius together, step firmly to the headlights, and stirringly announce the effects of evil and the moral of the play! Can you doubt, Mrs. Stalker, that the audience will depart bettered by my ultimate denunciation of crime?

“Certainly it has witnessed, for two hours, crime in its most attractive form — has experienced, to a certain degree, its charm. Individuals have even been tempted (through my realistic acting) to go and experience what they have watched imitated with such appeal — nevertheless, can you doubt that, when my final thundering exposition of the consequences of

evil rings in their ears they will not utterly banish from their minds such alluring conceptions and retain only the remembrance of my final warning? Certainly, Mrs. Stalker, this will be the case — as admitted unanimously by the Board of Sore-Senses. Who could *possibly* maintain otherwise?"

"No one!" cried Mrs. Stalker. "No broad-minded person ever maintained anything!"

Re Form nodded, and continued: "Listen, Mrs. Stalker — just listen, if you will, to my final bitter, downright, masterful and staggering condemnation of evil and definition of Good as proclaimed by me in my stupendous drama *Strength*. The curtain, you understand, has already begun to fall — I must make the moral of the production clear in a few terse sentences — sentences, Mrs. Stalker, that will echo in the minds of that audience until the crack of doom — sentences that

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will haunt them continually and drive them unerringly to the performance of great actions — sentences that will raise humanity to a higher level — that will embody the meaning, the purpose and the law of being — listen!

“ ‘My friends!’ I shout (and the curtain is now almost down) ‘My friends! — the moral of My Play is this! If you *must* seek evil — seek it! If you *must* know its bliss — know it! If you *must* live selfishly, do so! If you *must* break the heart of another, break it. But remember, oh my friends — remember — and I beg you this with all the prayerful agony of my soul — be moderate!

“ ‘Sin if you will — sin happily, unthinkingly, often — but only do not sin in excess. In excess alone, dear friends, lies danger.

“ ‘Go! Return to your homes! Husbands, thrash your wives! Wives, desert

your husbands! Children, despise your parents! Masters, persecute your servants! Servants, hate your masters!

“ ‘But remember — remember — I *implore* you, my dear people — be moderate!’ ”

Mr. Re Form paused, gasped, and wiped his eyes.

Vague Socialistus was weeping softly. Lieut. Watch Me gulped audibly and Mrs. Stalker laid her hand caressingly upon the hand of Mr. Re Form.

“Wonderful!” she murmured. “Stunning! Crushing! Illuminating! Oh, Mr. Re Form what power, what magnetism, what command of language!”

Mr. Re Form clenched his delicate, lily-like hand with its beautifully manicured finger nails, and gritted his teeth.

“Strength!” he muttered — “Strength! — that is all I possess. That is what the world needs, Mrs. Stalker.”

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“Here is a little leaflet” — he went on, diving into his pocket — “which contains the newspaper criticisms of the play. It might interest you.”

We read.

“*Strength*, Re Form’s stupendous drama of Immorality, has come to stay at the Popular Theatre. It is safe to predict that it will be the success of the season. Mr. Re Form, in his zeal for beauty and goodness, shows us graphically, and with all the power and suggestiveness of his genius, the appeal of ugliness and evil. In the scene in which ‘Youth’ chokes his aged Mother to death and burns her body neatly in the fireplace, Mr. Re Form reaches a pitch of indescribable mastery over his art. We throb with the ardor of the young murderer. We vibrate with him in terror and in triumph and feel with him indomitable hatred toward all petty and restraining influences.”

“In his interpretation of Love, Mr. Re Form is no less faithful to detail. Every aspect of passion in its most insidious and attractive form is carefully reproduced. Not a thought — not a desire — that is not clearly depicted. In the climax of this theme Mr. Re Form shows us that reason and principle can *never* be expected to control instinct. It is, on the whole, a production of gigantic force and we feel confident that its high and striking moral — ‘Each for Himself and All for Each’ will not be disregarded.”

“Marvellous!” exclaimed Mrs. Stalker. “Not one word of adverse criticism! You are famous for all time, Mr. Re Form!”

But Re Form, disposing of a whiskey-and-soda served as tomato bouillon, appeared quite content with the present.

X

The *Intellectuals*

VISIT WIDOWS AND ORPHANS

X

The *Intellectuals*

VISIT WIDOWS AND ORPHANS

YES," said Mrs. Rushabout, "next to the Preservation of Bugs, the Poor are my consuming passion. Hugo," she commanded the chauffeur, "to the slums!"

"I have an engagement for tea at the Ritz," she explained, turning to me, "and must be back in twenty minutes — but that will give me *plenty* of time to introduce you to my dear, *dear* friends among the poor. Have you ever realized, Miss Wouldbe, what an elevating, stimulating and inspiring influence we are able to exert upon these creatures?"

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“I do not believe in giving them money — I *never* give them money — but I give them my time and my advice and the benefit of my society and the dear things are *SO* grateful. ‘Friendly visiting,’ Miss Wouldbe — that is what I do — yes, once a week regularly. And I have invented such a unique manner of getting to know these people — one must be *most* tactful, of course, or they will not open their quaint, cramped hearts to us — in fact very few persons, Miss Wouldbe, possess the tact, delicacy, and purity of purpose essential toward producing good results in work among the very poor. But I have always been most successful.

“I don’t know what it is that attracts people to me, but something there undoubtedly is, and I make friends among them *so easily*! I suppose it is my personality — intangible you know — and yet undeniable.

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“Ah, here we are at Fitzsimmons Street, —Hugo, you may stop at the curb here and wait for us. If we do not return in fifteen minutes, call the police.

“I always think it safer to provide for emergencies,” she said, turning to me once more, “one can never tell what may happen in these dreadful dirty little alleys — and I always leave the car some distance from the house of the creatures I intend to visit — yes, thoughtfulness, nothing more — it would be so vulgar to roll up to their door in a Rolls-Royce, you know, when they have scarcely enough money for a loaf of bread.

“Yes, really, some of these people are dreadfully poor — but I never believe in giving money, Miss Wouldbe, oh, never — that is against my principles. It encourages begging, drunkenness, theft, over-feeding, illegitimacy, lying, laziness, stupidity, and all manner of crime. More-

over, I consider it simply a means of bleeding one's conscience — nothing more. It is, of course, easier to give money than to give, as I do, my *personality*.

“Why, you have no idea how these people adore me — comical, really comical — they simply *exist* for my visits, and of course I know all their life histories — very interesting, too — as a rule very odd — but essentially their own fault, the tragedies — I tell them so over and over. We are the captains of our souls, I tell them, we control our destinies — but they have a perverse sense of humor: ‘Perhaps we control our destinies but we do not control our rents,’ said one old woman and laughed like a devil.

“There was no humor in the remark. However, I let it pass — tactful, you know, and never insistent — that is the way to manage these people.”

And Mrs. Rushabout divested herself

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of her string of pearls, her platinumed pins, and her diamond rings, dropping them into her satchel.

“I always take off my jewelry,” she explained, “bad taste to wear it before the starving. My heart aches for them. How I long, sometimes, to give them a little money — or at *least* a pearl or two! — but I resist the temptation — utterly against my principles — conducive to begging, excessive eating, theft, illegitimacy, lying, laziness, stupidity and any other crime you can think of. I curb my naturally generous instincts, Miss Wouldbe, — otherwise, believe me, I would return home without a stitch on my back, a single stitch — my heart is so big. I would *so* delight in giving. It is the curse of my life that my principles forbid me to give lavishly, inordinately, continually.

“Ah, well, we must each of us bear our afflictions bravely in silence!” And,

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sighing deeply, Mrs. Rushabout picked her way along the mud-coated, tin-can-decorated and children-obstructed sidewalk.

There were indeed hundreds of children. They ran screaming between our legs, sprawled delightedly in the gutter, bumped us from every side, snickered audibly as we passed, and even pelted us, from the rear, with cherry stones. This last was too much. Mrs. Rushabout turned furiously on the main instigator of the attack — a dirty, freckle-faced urchin with a sticky grin and a Lollypop, who straddled the curb, sucked, and stared.

“How dare you?” cried Mrs. Rushabout. “How *dare* you be so rude, little *imp*? Doesn’t your mother teach you manners? Don’t you go to school? Apologize *immediately*!”

He of the Lollypop continued to stare, impudently.

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“Apologize!” repeated Mrs. Rushabout, “apologize immediately, I say!”

The urchin removed the Lollypop from his mouth, stuck it behind his ear, and observed ecstatically:

“Gee, fellers—watch the old gink spit!”

I thought Mrs. Rushabout would faint. She became pale.

“Vulgar little thing!” she cried bitterly. “*This* is the thanks I get for choosing the rocky path of helpfulness to others — for offering my entire days in the interest of the deluded masses! *This* is the thanks! You see what I have to suffer! You see the patience, self-sacrifice and abasement that this work demands.

“Ah, well, we must hurry or I will not get to the Ritz for tea!”

And Mrs. Rushabout led on.

“But I have not shown you my usual plan of procedure in the slums,” she said, “I have found that the most direct and

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facile manner of becoming acquainted with families is to do so through the children, and all of them — those at least who are not perfect little beasts like that boy (pointing backward) take to me immediately, Miss Wouldbe — oh, quite immediately.”

“They tell me exactly how their parents make a living, whether both or only one of them drinks, how many there are in the family, whether an addition is expected, and other details which would be rather difficult, you understand, to obtain directly from utter strangers who have lost the sweet unconsciousness of childhood. Children confide in me naturally, Miss Wouldbe — there is something about me that — well, you shall see.”

And she stopped before a diminutive, rumpled girl who was engrossed in the absorbing pastime of rummaging in a garbage can.

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“My dear child!” exclaimed Mrs. Rushabout. “You must never do that — never, my dear — oh horrid! kee! kee! Naughty! Mustn’t do!”

The little girl surveyed Mrs. Rushabout solemnly with a pair of large brown eyes.

“Now where do you live?” asked Mrs. Rushabout. “Tell the pretty lady. Have you any little brothers and sisters? Does Mother take in washing?”

Still the small girl remained mute and entranced.

“Don’t be afraid,” went on Mrs. Rushabout, volubly, with honeyed sweetness — “Nothing hurt nice little girly. Pretty lady loves little girlies — pretty lady wants little girly to talk.”

Then it was that the “little girly” made an unfortunate remark.

“Where,” she inquired, “is the pretty lady?”

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Mrs. Rushabout seemed, for a moment, stunned, but recovered in Spartan fashion.

"Pretty lady talking to you now — answer her, dearie, does Mother take in washing?"

"Whatchu want t'know for?" burst out "little girly" with sudden suspicion. "Is your clothes dirty?"

Mrs. Rushabout gasped.

"Never," she said to me, as we walked hastily away, "never, Miss Wouldbe, have I been so brazenly insulted! Never have I failed to succeed in rendering children my abject slaves within a moment — there is a conspiracy afoot, Miss Wouldbe, a conspiracy, mark my words. There will be an uprising — *an uprising of the masses!*" And she shook her head significantly.

"Well, here we are at Mrs. Mulligan's. A dear, dear friend of mine, Miss Wouldbe — poor woman! Her husband is a

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confirmed drunkard; she has ten children, and her rent is — er — I forget the amount — but enormous, oh, very enormous!”

So saying she tapped upon a paint-blistered door that tilted coquettishly to one side and trembled from head to foot under her touch. It was opened after much scrambling and bumping about inside by a pitifully thin, dreary-eyed woman with a corkscrew knot of hair upon the exact top of her head, who carried a strenuously objecting bundle of rags that turned out to be a baby.

Upon perceiving us she gave no evidence of the enthusiastic delight with which I had expected to be received by one of Mrs. Rushabout’s “dear, dear friends.”

“Oh, how-dy-do, Mrs. Rushabout — Hey!—can’t-you-brats-quit-that-infernal-racket?” she exclaimed in one breath, and

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it was only upon entering the house that I realized the epithet "brat" had not been addressed to ourselves.

The room that was kitchen, laundry, parlor, hall, and everything-but-bedroom combined, fairly seethed with children; children on the table and under it, children draped over chairs, children stuffed under the stove, children pressed in every gap and plastered onto every window — children who sneezed, hiccoughed, quarreled, giggled, coughed, ate, shrieked, sniffed and gurgled; while over and about them and us hung a distinct and individual odor not to be found among any of the varieties of 4711 to the use of which Mrs. Rushabout is addicted.

"Sit down, loidies," said Mrs. Mulligan, waving vaguely over the pandemonium — but we considered it wiser to remain standing, there being no empty chairs or tables visible and the stove giv-

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ing forth every indication of extreme heat.

When at last some of the human incumbrance had been shoved from the furniture we sank upon two rickety stools opposite Mrs. Mulligan and the baby.

“Your youngest?” asked Mrs. Rushabout sweetly.

The baby was very evidently not a day over three months old. Mrs. Mulligan bristled.

“Sure, an’ it’s me youngest; an’ did ye think I wuz fer breakin’ the laws o’ nature? An’ Mr. Mulligan dead he is these last three month! Died, he did, on a wash-day — as I might a knowed as he would!”

Mrs. Rushabout expressed heartfelt sympathy.

“Oh, ye needn’t be a-cheerin’ me up. It ain’t a great loss to no one, and I ain’t one as says it is, once he’s dead an’ gone; whin the while he lived I was bidin’

the day. No, I ain't one o' these snicker-in', double-tongued sneaks that be sayin' continually what they don't mean — I ain't that, Mrs. Rushabout — an' — ”

“Of course not,” said Mrs. Rushabout, “of course you ain't — aren't.”

“I'm an honest woman,” went on Mrs. Mulligan, beginning to weep, “an honest woman, Mrs. Rushabout, what ain't no liar nor no sneak even if you *do* say — ”

“Oh, my dear — but I didn't say anything!” cried Mrs. Rushabout in dismay.

At that moment the baby raised a distracted howl and there came a truly terrifying banging upon the door, together with the voices of men clamoring to open.

In her alarm Mrs. Rushabout dropped her satchel; and the pearl necklace, the platinumed pins, and five diamond rings rolling wildly in all directions were at once the immediate object of a scramble

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by pushing, tumbling, shrieking mobs of gleeful infants.

After a struggle the jewels were extracted from small, desperately clenched fists. The door was opened.

There stood Mrs. Rushabout's Hugo, and the entire Police Force of Philadelphia with clubs and hatchets.

Mrs. Rushabout was very upset. So, evidently, was Mrs. Mulligan, who had gone into hysterics back of the stove; so too was the baby, who indulged in a long, unintermittent yell; so, also, the children, who sneezed, coughed, hiccoughed, sniffed and gurgled but refrained from quarreling, shrieking, eating, and giggling.

"This is most unfortunate," stammered Mrs. Rushabout, "*most* unfortunate, Mrs. Mulligan. No, Hugo, I am perfectly safe. Nothing is the matter — Yes — I forgot the time — Good gracious! The woman is having a fit!"

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And she rushed to Mrs. Mulligan, who was rocking to and fro, sobbing, and wringing her hands in a distracted manner.

“Has they come fer the rent? Tell ’em I’ll pay — tomorrer — Tell ’em I ain’t got no money but I got ten kids. Tell ’em to take one of the kids. Oh, lordie me! oh, lordie me!” And she began to beat her breast with great vigor.

“Hugo,” said Mrs. Rushabout, “send one of those policemen for a doctor — or a druggist — anything will do — and bring the car immediately.

“I shall have to leave. I am late for my engagement at the Ritz!”

EPILOGUE

Farewell, now, Mrs. Rushabout!
Go sip insipid tea!
Farewell to Cram Itin and all
That "brilliant Coterie"

Of famed, fantastic, futile fools
Who struggle (lost in thought)
Into a cold Eternity
And vanish — as they ought!



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